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The Atlantic Monthly

AUGUST 1999

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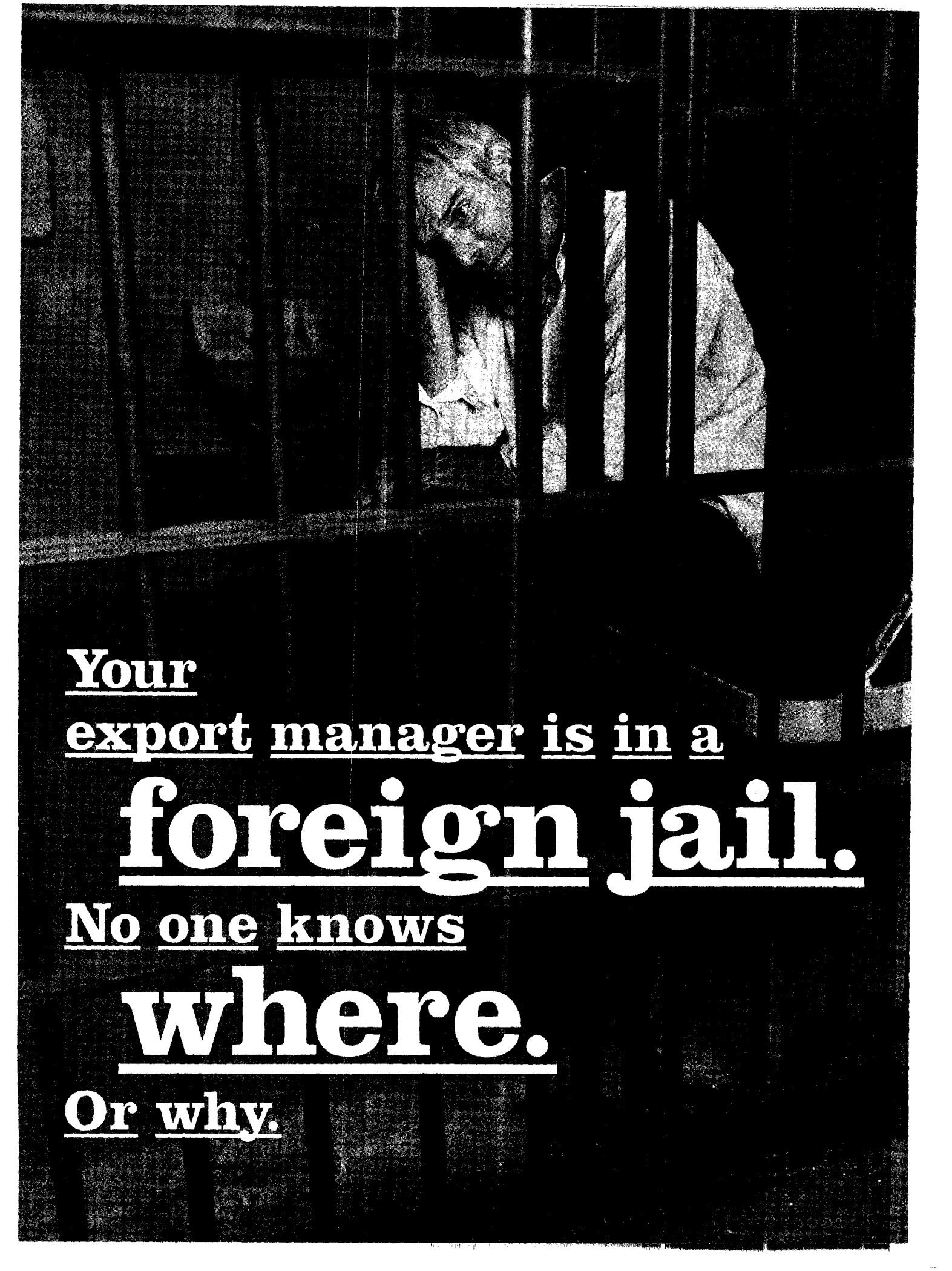
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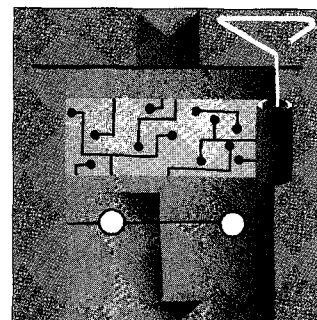
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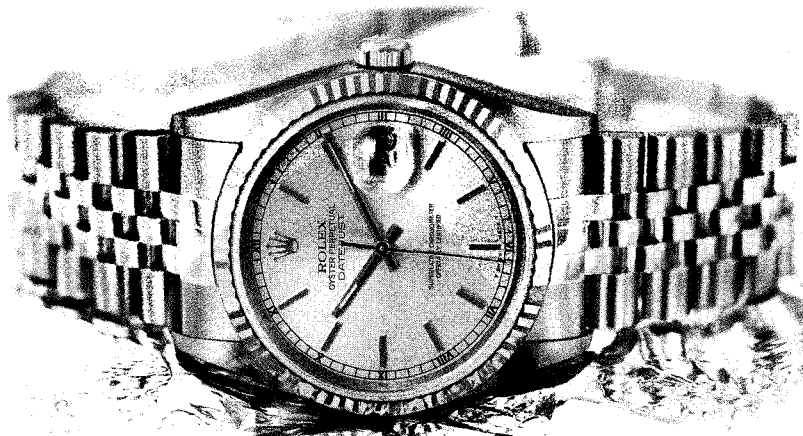
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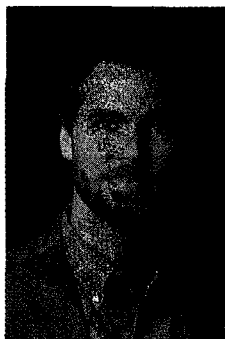
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Ted Halstead, thirty, the author of our cover article, "A Politics for Generation X," is a venture capitalist of talent and ideas. Not even a year old, his New America Foundation (he is the president and chief executive officer) exists to help launch the careers of young journalists with a demonstrated interest in politics and public policy. Fellowships last at least a year, during which it is preferred that the writer is in residence at the foundation's Washington offices. There is no ideological fine print, Halstead says, and then adds some:

"No *National Review* conservatives, no *Nation* liberals. We are seeking writers whose views do not fit into the traditional left-right boxes."

Halstead is a Dartmouth graduate with a master's degree from the Mid-Career program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, at Harvard. When restless, he starts founda-



WESLEY WONG

tions. In 1993, at the age of twenty-five, with \$15,000, Halstead founded Redefining Progress, a San Francisco-based think tank; it now has a budget of \$2 million. With his colleagues Jonathan Rowe and Clifford Cobb, Halstead wrote the much-cited cover story for the October, 1995, *Atlantic*, "If the GDP Is Up, Why Is America Down?" That article proposed a new way of measuring economic growth—one that took account of its environmental and other costs.

The agenda Halstead outlines in "A Politics for Generation X" reflects the general prospectus of the New America Foundation, which describes an "America suffer[ing] from an impoverished public debate in which neither side of the political divide is adequately addressing the . . . problems of our time." New America's mission is "to build a new set of political ideas based on innovative and pragmatic solutions" and "to train and support the next generation of public intellectuals." Thus the hypothetical help-wanted ad above should more accurately read "**Wanted: New Public Intellectuals**"—though that would probably discourage all but those self-important beyond their years. —THE EDITORS

CONTRIBUTORS

Alex Beam ("Tabloid Law") is a columnist for *The Boston Globe* and the author of two novels, *Fellow Travelers* (1987) and *The Americans Are Coming* (1991).

Seymour Chwast (cover art) is the director of the Pushpin Group, a graphic-design firm in New York. His work, in a variety of media, has been exhibited widely in the United States, Asia, and Europe.

Michael Gerber and **Jonathan Schwarz** ("The Periodic Table of Rejected Elements") have written humor for many publications.

John Haines ("Poem for the End of the Century") is a poet, an essayist, and a teacher. His most recent book is *At the End of This Summer: Poems 1948–54* (1997). His memoir, *The Stars, the Snow, the Fire* (1989), will be reissued in paperback next spring.

Ted Halstead ("A Politics for Generation X") is the president of the New America Foundation, in Washington, D.C.

Michael Hammer ("Is Work Bad for You?") is the president of Hammer and Company, a management education and research firm. His latest book is *Beyond Reengineering: How the Process-Centered Organization Is Changing Our Work and Our Lives* (1996).

Jennifer Bingham Hull ("Can Coffee Drinkers Save the Rain Forest?") is a writer who lives in Florida.

Jamie James ("Ubud, the Heart of Bali") is a critic and travel writer who lives in New York and Bali. He is the author of *The Music of the Spheres: Science and the Natural Order of the Universe* (1993) and *Pop Art* (1996).

Robert D. Kaplan ("China: A World Power Again") is a correspondent for *The Atlantic* and the author of six books, including *Balkan Ghosts* (1993), *The Arabists* (1993), *The Ends of the Earth* (1996), and *An Empire Wilderness* (1998).

Thomas Lux ("Henry Clay's Mouth") teaches writing at Sarah Lawrence College.

His most recent book is *New and Selected Poems 1975–1995* (1997).

Charles C. Mann ("Living With Linux") is a correspondent for *The Atlantic*. His most recent book is *@Large* (1997), written with David Freedman. Mann's article in this issue is the first in a series of technology pieces that he will write for *The Atlantic* in the coming months.

Max Singer ("The Population Surprise") was a founder of the Hudson Institute. He is a co-author, with Aaron Wildavsky, of *The Real World Order* (1996).

Claude M. Steele ("Thin Ice: 'Stereotype Threat' and Black College Students") is the Lucie Stern Professor in the Social Sciences at Stanford University. His articles have appeared in *The New York Times* and *The American Prospect*.

Lynna Williams ("Comparative Religion") is an associate professor of English at Emory University, where she directs the creative-writing program. She is the author of *Things Not Seen and Other Stories* (1992).

Why Ms. Felber teaches her class to be so negative.

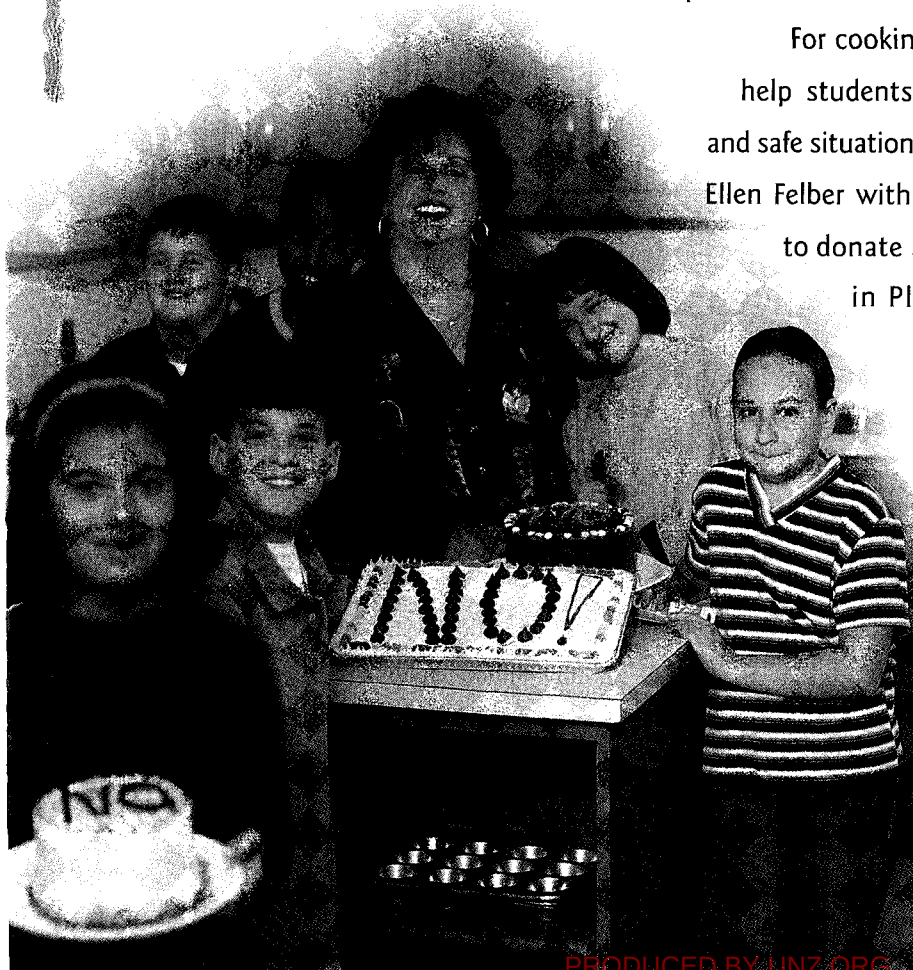
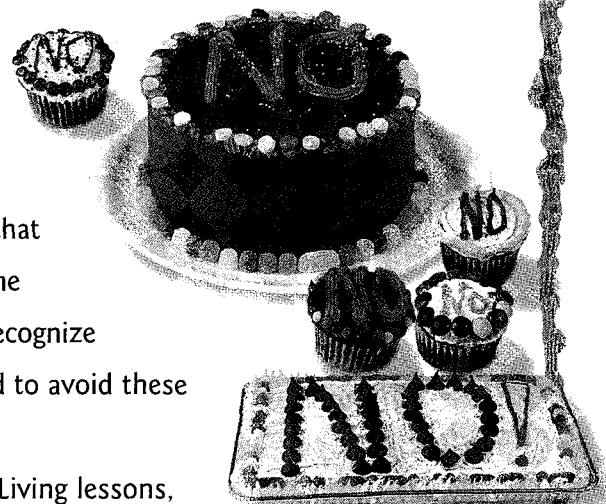
As a Special Education teacher, Ms. Ellen Felber knows that Exceptional Children are no exception to sexual abuse. So she devised an ingenious lesson to teach her students how to recognize the dangers in a way that wouldn't overly frighten them and to avoid these dangers by learning when to "say no".

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By incorporating many skills and senses into this lesson, Ms. Felber finds that her Exceptional Students can associate and remember the sections and their meaning. The total experience is remembered and, with it, the lesson.

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LETTERS

The Great Disruption

Francis Fukuyama ("The Great Disruption," May *Atlantic*) remarks that "in fact the great American postwar crime wave began in a period of full employment and general prosperity." Precisely. Prosperity results in modernization, and modernization has various consequences. One of those consequences was the rise of a new urban underclass.

Our urban underclass consists of displaced southern peasants and their descendants. In 1945 much of southern agriculture, notably cotton, was still dependent on hand labor, mediated by the sharecropper-tenancy system. In Alvin Toffler's terms, these workers were still in the first wave, rather than the second. Depression and war had forced southern agriculture to defer modernization for twenty years. In the postwar period southern landowners had the money for new equipment, especially combine cotton harvesters. Southern landlords evicted their tenants, destroyed the tenants' houses, and bought new combine harvesters.

The refugees of this displacement process arrived in northern cities only to find that northern industrialists had also been buying labor-saving machinery and that the existing industrial labor force had first claim on whatever jobs were available. Eventually some industrial jobs opened up, when the northern working class no longer wanted them (having sent their children to school to become policemen, teachers, and so forth), but that took time. In the meantime, many of the displaced peasants turned to crime and violence.

Many European countries (and Japan) have taken the stance that allowing people to evict peasants is simply not profitable from a societal point of view. Peasants can adapt to the city only if they are allowed to arrive at their own pace, with the option of returning to the farm if urban life does not agree with them. Even when European peasants did not own land, they were pro-

tected by appropriate legislation. Of course, often they did own land, because as early as the sixteenth century central governments began enforcing rent control, eventually expropriating the landlord in favor of the peasant.

Andrew D. Todd
Morgantown, W. Va.

In "The Great Disruption," Francis Fukuyama writes, "A dynamic, technologically innovative economy will by its very nature disrupt existing social relations." I find this statement difficult to reconcile with his claim that "social order, once disrupted, tends to get remade," and even more so with his optimistic assertion that such a process of social regeneration may have already begun.

The technological explosion to which Fukuyama attributes the rampant individualism at the heart of our social disorder is the product of neo-liberal democracy and market capitalism, both imbued by Fukuyama with an aura of Hegelian inevitability, and both totally committed to the excessive individualism he deplores. Clearly, it is not in *their* nature to encourage the "trade-off between personal freedom and community" that he feels is so essential to rehumanizing society, so one is at a loss to identify the source of his optimism.

Fukuyama fails to consider that the collective psyche of the late twentieth century has been so deeply imprinted with the ideology of individualism that even those who are conscious of the need for trade-offs between personal freedom and community tend to back away when faced with the price to be paid for their professed ideals. This is the real victory of late capitalism over the hearts and minds of its adherents.

Until Fukuyama addresses this collective psychological fact, his belief that the Great Disruption may have run its course will remain little more than wishful thinking.

Howard Bluth
Baltimore, Md.

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Sometimes one article is worth the year's subscription price. For me it is "The Great Disruption."

Richard E. Appel

Lebanon, Ohio

Francis Fukuyama replies:

Andrew Todd points to the migration of rural blacks to northern cities as the source of what I labeled the "Great Disruption"—that is, the descent into social anarchy and family breakdown that emerged in many inner cities by the 1980s. But poor blacks were being drawn north, as Nicholas Lemann showed in his book *The Promised Land*, by plentiful low-skill jobs in the 1940s and 1950s; intense social pathology didn't emerge for another fifteen to twenty years. I believe that it is less the migration itself than the disappearance of these jobs in the 1970s that is at the root of the problem, exacerbated by a welfare system that rewarded single-parent families.

Howard Bluth seems to think that intensive individualism is the product of a certain type of late-twentieth-century "neo-liberal" capitalism. In fact it is deeply embedded in the whole Western Enlightenment, which has been ongoing for at least the past three centuries, and is part and parcel of the individual freedoms we all enjoy. As I explain at greater length in the book on which my *Atlantic* article was based, capitalism both destroys and creates social capital, and on balance is, as Adam Smith argued, a moralizing force in commercial societies. But the ultimate reason for my optimism is that we human beings by our very natures don't like individualism carried to extremes, and tend to moderate it by creating new social rules that bind us in communities. Whether I'm right this time around, only time will tell.

I am, of course, very grateful that Richard Appel feels he got his money's worth in subscribing to *The Atlantic*.

Napoleon in Rags

I was very disappointed in Francis Davis's "Napoleon in Rags" (May *Atlantic*). I am simply not interested in hearing why the music someone loves (often the music with which he or she came of age) is more profound or meaningful than someone else's music.

Davis's article presents opinions as facts

and is both unattractive and misguided. An example: Davis says "As songwriters, John Lennon and Paul McCartney were surprisingly traditional; they brought a youthful cheekiness to pop, but in terms of lyrical sentiment and melodic structure their songs of the sixties merely updated Tin Pan Alley conventions." Very few composers or musicologists would agree with such an irresponsible and inaccurate statement, because, of all things, the Beatles were extremely original in their progressions.

Alexander Wood

Madison, Wis.

Francis Davis refers in passing to "Positively 4th Street" as "a song from *Highway 61 Revisited*," the 1965 album often praised as Dylan's masterwork. It isn't.

Glenn Hughes

San Antonio, Texas

A couple of factual notes: The song "Positively 4th Street" is not on *Highway 61 Revisited*. Also, the quote from "Like a Rolling Stone" isn't quite correct—it's "Napoleon in rags and the language that he used."

Stephen Wacker

Seattle, Wash.

Francis Davis replies:

Perhaps believing "Tin Pan Alley" to be a pejorative, Alexander Wood misunderstands what I said about the Beatles, whose music I preferred to Dylan's when I was a teenager and still do. Unlike Dylan's quasi-folk ballads and blues, Lennon and McCartney's early numbers were in the same 32-bar format as Jerome Kern's and Irving Berlin's, but with an updated beat. Their chord progressions were sometimes "original," if by this Wood means inventive, though not necessarily more inventive than Kern's or Berlin's.

Glenn Hughes and Stephen Wacker are right about "Positively 4th Street," which was recorded at one of the sessions for *Highway 61 Revisited* but did not appear on that LP. Dylan often changes the lyrics to his songs in performance; to my ears, it sounds like he sings "the language that he'd use" on both the 1965 hit of "Like a Rolling Stone" and the version from Manchester, England, on *Live 1966*.

The Great War

There was in fact a great deal at stake for Britain in the Great War," Benjamin Schwarz writes ("Was the Great War Necessary?," May *Atlantic*). "Even assuming a benevolent German order on the Continent, the result of Germany's victory would have been that British independence as a great power would have been greatly diminished." But Britain ostensibly "won" the war, and its independence as a great power was greatly diminished in any case.

Britain's efforts from September of 1939 to 1942 to contend with the German and the Japanese armed forces are laughable—whether we are talking about France or Singapore. Britain was saved from German conquest in the Second World War by the Americans and the Soviet Union. The fact of the matter is this: Britain in August of 1914 had already entered a steep descent toward being a second-rate power, whether economically or militarily. But the British government and the majority of Britain's ruling class could not face the reality of this decline, because then they would have had to reflect on the reasons for this descent: principally an unwillingness to absorb and utilize modern technology, an educational system backward at all levels, and the physical weakness and illiteracy of Britain's working class. War seemed a good alternative to facing these realities. Glory could cover up reason.

Nothing could have prevented Britain's decline in the twentieth century relative to Germany, the United States, and Russia. But the country's social and political leaders would not face this cruel fact, which indicated plainly that nothing was to be gained from war with Germany in 1914, and much was to be lost. Niall Ferguson is right.

Norman F. Cantor
Professor of History
New York University
Sag Harbor, N.Y.

In Benjamin Schwarz's review of Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War* one looks in vain for a discussion of the major deficiency of the book. It treats the reasons the British had for entering the First World War as though these were the only important things to examine when one considers the casualties incurred, without ever considering the incompetence of Britain's

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generals and the political choices made in choosing those generals and keeping them in charge.

It is as though a seriously ill person were hurt in an auto accident while being driven to the hospital by a reckless driver. One cannot examine only whether one would have been better off staying at home; one should consider whether one could have chosen a better driver.

The reckless drivers for Britain in the First World War were its generals. Hundreds of thousands of men were senselessly slaughtered in obedience to a reckless macho doctrine called "élan vital." Few of the commanding generals acted on the self-evident fact that charging bravely back and forth across strategically worthless land will not win a war against shells, machine guns, and poison gas.

Stephen E. Adler
New York, N.Y.

Benjamin Schwarz replies:

I agree with Norman Cantor's assertions about pre-war Britain's weaknesses. But his letter mixes apples and oranges. The historians who have most carefully diagnosed those weaknesses (Correlli Barnett, whom I discuss in my article, and Paul Kennedy) disagree with him and agree with me about what was at stake for Britain in the Great War. Certainly Britain's relative decline was inevitable; that does not mean that it would have been wise of British statesmen to stand aside and accept the dominance of Europe by a single power. Statesmanship, after all, is about *managing* "inevitable" changes in the international system. Britain found itself in such a terrible predicament during the Second World War because its interwar leaders failed to manage their country's relative decline, not because its leaders in 1914 wouldn't place their country's security and prosperity at the sufferance of Germany. Of course, Britain's independence has been greatly diminished since the Second World War; but thanks to British statesmen on the eve of the First World War, London has been under the sway of a (relatively) benign hegemon across the Atlantic Ocean rather than an unpredictable and strident one across the English Channel. Finally, although Professor Cantor is a fine medieval historian, his suggestion that Britain's leaders conspiratorially committed their country to war to "cover

up" internal weaknesses is unsupported by any historical evidence.

If Stephen Adler's assessment of the peculiar incompetence of British generals were correct, how do we explain the fact that Britain suffered far fewer casualties than Germany, France, Russia, and Austro-Hungary? From 1914 to 1918 the British army learned at hideous cost a new kind of warfare that baffled even experienced Continental armies. Incompetent generals there certainly were, as there are in every war. But the terrible truth—the tragedy—of the Great War was that the wealth that was available to the great powers for war-making, together with the state of military technology, meant that no masterstroke of strategy would swiftly or at low cost terminate the struggle.

Killing Whales

In the May issue of *The Atlantic*, William Aron, William Burke, and Milton Freeman argue that whales can be killed under hunting restrictions for years to come ("Flouting the Convention"). Yes, they can, but *should* they be killed at all? On purely sentimental grounds I stand with the whales in the debate. I draw support from the voice of the Irish storyteller Sean O'Faolain, who reminds us that "we are for a great part of our lives at the mercy of uncharted currents of the heart."

Whales are awesome. A sperm whale dives a mile deep in the sea and holds its breath for more than an hour. The blue whale (the largest mammal) outweighs the pygmy shrew (the smallest) by a factor of ninety million, yet the two have similar tissues and organs, and both, I presume, nurse their young with a certain tenderness. Whales live in families and play in the moonlight; they talk to one another in distress. They are more complete and successful in their world than we are in ours. They deserve to be known and cherished, not for their potential as meatballs but as a collective inspiration for humankind. The thought of managing them for their spiritual value alone seems far more civilized than is the thought of managing them to satisfy a tiny fraction of the world's insatiable demand for marine products of commerce.

Victor B. Scheffer
Bellevue, Wash.

William Aron, William Burke, and Milton Freeman reply:

We cannot accept the view that caring about human beings is antagonistic to being concerned for plants and animals. It is our responsibility to see that our ecosystem is preserved. Implicit in this is a recognition of the importance of all life forms, including those used for food as well as those enjoyed for their beauty or their role in preserving biological balance. A healthy and inspiring world, however, requires more than biological diversity; it is also strongly dependent on cultural diversity.

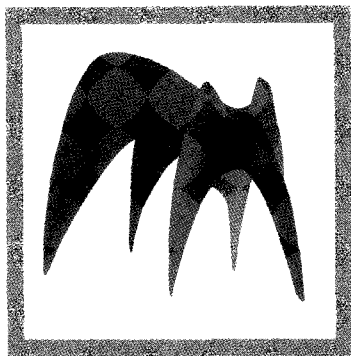
We plead for understanding of those cultures different from our own. We share with Victor Scheffer his awe for whales. They are magnificent. He clearly states that his views are sentimental; he is a distinguished marine scientist, but his cultural perspective on whales, too, merits respect. Such sentiments, in our view, do not outweigh the needs of other cultures and communities whose ongoing dependence on whaling can be demonstrated. As long as they conduct their food-getting activities in a nonwasteful, ecologically sound, and lawful manner, we cannot believe there is any legitimate basis for thinking that the world is too small to accommodate such cultural differences.

The fact that people may choose to eat a particular animal does not imply disrespect or even indifference. In fact, many hunters speak of a special closeness to the animals they hunt—something that many nonhunters find hard to understand.

Advice & Consent

As someone who makes a living growing and selling apples, I read with some concern your June Almanac item on food [regarding the level of pesticide residues in certain fruits]. A typical consumer might conclude that eating U.S. produce poses a serious health risk. Far from it. Using a broad brush to paint a negative picture, and inflammatory statements such as "potentially unhealthy to children" and "domestic produce in general is more contaminated than imported," the author uses tabloid tactics to alarm, rather than inform, the public.

Robert Harvey
Northfield, Minn.



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The **Atlantic Monthly**

1971—Reporting

1972—Reporting

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1979—Fiction

1982—Public Interest

—Essays & Criticism

1988—Feature Writing

—Public Interest

—Fiction

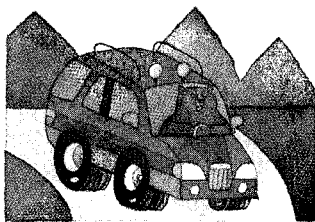
1993—General Interest

1995—Reporting

1998—Public Interest

1999—Essays & Criticism

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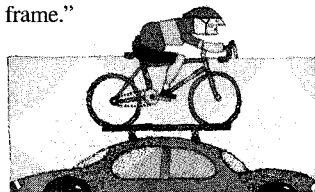


Demographics

August is the busiest time of year at Yosemite National Park: some 700,000 visitors are expected this month. The number of "human-bear incidents"—aggressive acts by bears toward human beings or property—also generally peaks in August. Last year bears in Yosemite caused more than \$630,000 in property damage and broke into more than 1,300 cars—some 350 during August alone. Several factors contribute to the problem. From the 1920s through the 1960s park officials fed bears restaurant scraps, unwittingly encouraging an appetite for human food. In addition, the fact that only black bears, which are less dangerous than grizzlies, remain in Yosemite may have led the public to be overly complacent. Although until recent decades human-bear incidents were dealt with only reactively—offending bears were relocated or killed—efforts now also include prevention, and focus more on the behavior of human beings than on that of bears. Park funds are increasingly used to build bear-proof food lockers and to get visitors to take precautions.

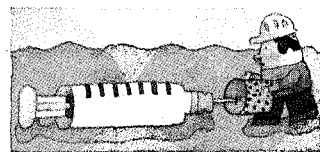
Expiring Patent

No. 4,346,772. Power assisting device for a bicycle. "A power assisting assembly for said vehicle comprising . . . a motor; a driving wheel rotatably driven by said motor, said driving wheel being longitudinally spaced rearwardly of [the bicycle's back] wheel . . . [and] connected to a linkage assembly . . . connected to [the bicycle's] frame."



Government

August 21: According to the 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, today is the deadline for Congress to pass legislation to protect individual electronic medical records. If Congress fails to do so, the Health and Human Services Department has until next February to issue regulations to this end. Only a handful of states have passed comprehensive laws guaranteeing the confidentiality of hospital and medical records. Concern over the issue has grown as records and lab results have been increasingly computerized, and thus are potentially subject to wider access. Another of the act's requirements, which directs the federal government to issue every citizen a "health identifier"—a code that would allow the person's entire medical history to be accessed electronically—has been put on hold owing to privacy concerns. The identifiers could permit better medical care in emergencies; however, many fear that they could be abused by, for example, employers, who might obtain the medical and psychological histories of potential employees and discriminate on the basis of them.



Health & Safety

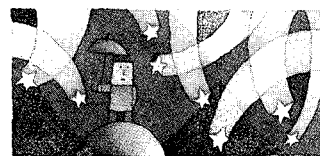
New regulations to protect health-care workers against needle-stick injuries and exposure to blood-borne pathogens have now gone into effect in California. The rules require the use, whenever possible, of "needleless" intravenous systems—devices that do not use needles after the initial puncture—or of devices that blunt sharp ends after use or that encapsulate fluids. This is the first law in the country to mandate safer needle systems.

About a half-million accidental needle-sticks are reported each year, and it is estimated that 1,000 health-care workers contract HIV or hepatitis B or C as a result. At least 250 types of safer needle systems have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Most hospitals do not use them, however, presumably because they are more expensive than conventional needles and because of long-standing contracts between hospitals and needle manufacturers. Plans are under way in more than 15 other states to develop similar needle-safety regulations.



Food

August 27: The chances of contracting *Salmonella* poisoning should lessen after today, when new refrigeration and labeling rules for fresh eggs take effect. The regulations, issued by the Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service, require that eggs be kept at or below 45 degrees during transport from farms to stores, and that egg cartons carry labels stating that eggs must be refrigerated at all times. Studies suggest that these steps could result in an 8 percent decrease in *Salmonella*-poisoning cases, because the bacteria cannot grow at low temperatures. The USDA has estimated that one in 20,000 eggs contains *Salmonella*; according to the Centers for Disease Control, as many as 4 million people are infected each year. Outbreaks have been traced to raw and undercooked eggs in Caesar salad, French toast, and hollandaise sauce, among other things. Some believe that today's regulations do not go far enough: expiration dates are still not required for eggs.

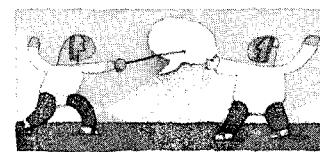


The Skies

August 1: Venus sits about 8 degrees above the horizon at sunset. Over the course of the month it will go from being the "evening star" to being the "morning star," by month's end rising in the east more than an hour before the Sun. 12: The Perseid meteor shower peaks tonight. Because the Moon is new, observers with clear skies overhead should have an excellent view of these unusually fast, bright meteors. 26: Full Moon, also known this month as the Green Corn or Sturgeon Moon.

50 Years Ago

Ann Leighton, writing in the August, 1949, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "Conversation, like sex, is a universal human need commonly treated as a recreation. A life force without which civilization would perish, it is classed as a subject for serious discussion with remote elegancies like wines and manners. Essential to the well-being and sanity of mankind, it is dealt with in books—not on medicine or religion or sociology but on etiquette. Never practiced, seldom taught, it is required of everyone. Prohibited only to certain monks, it is demanded of young girls in finishing schools who confuse it forever with balls and rapiers. As with cooking and the investing of money, it is made a cult whose initiates seek to terrify outsiders. Revered chiefly in its maimed form, the monologue, it is usually declared dead by those who think they know. Disjointed, denied, buried . . . the miracle of conversation is that it goes on."



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China: A World Power Again

*What is usual for China is unusual for the
West—at least in recent memory*

WHERE China ends, mountains, deserts, and nomadism begin. China's historical borders extend to the edge of arable land in the eastern half of Asia: the Himalayas to the southwest, the Gobi wastes to the north, and the Central Asian khanates (which is what these new post-Soviet states really are) to the west. Its sheer size has meant that China's dynastic transitions have been vulnerable to rebellions, warlordism, and a weak central government. The Ming and Qing Dynasties both collapsed because population growth led to worsening poverty among peasants and more prosperity among merchants and landowners: the peasants revolted against their poverty, and the wealthier stratum revolted against imperial control and taxation.

The same vulnerability persists today. Jack A. Goldstone, in a paper for the Peace and Conflict Studies Program at the University of Toronto, writes,

The combination of forces revealed in the Tiananmen Square Uprising of [June 4,] 1989—a coalition of merchants, entrepreneurs, urban workers, students and intellectuals, with some support from within the regime, in revolt against a government that survived only because of continued loyalty of key military and bureaucratic leaders—is quite similar to that of past patterns of Chinese revolt.

by Robert D. Kaplan

The lessons that China's leaders learned from Tiananmen Square were from their own history. They knew that, as in the past, many of the demonstrators were more concerned about economic conditions than about freedom per se. They also knew that anarchy in former times, from the Ming rebellions to Mao Zedong's Great Cultural Revolution, cost millions of lives. Western journalists and intellectuals who have been raised in secure, upper-middle-class environments may call

for China to welcome a bit of instability for the sake of change, but for China's leaders chaos and instability have never been abstractions. Deng Xiaoping, China's ruler in 1989, lived with the memory of his son's having been forced to jump from an upper-story window by a crowd during the Cultural Revolution.

To satisfy the population while preventing chaos, after Tiananmen the Communist Party opened up both the economy and the society—the former much more than the latter. In the past decade probably more people in China have seen their material lives dramatically improve than ever before in recorded history, even as democracy has led to social collapse and mafia rule in Russia. The Chinese have also experienced a dramatic increase in personal freedom. Two China experts,



Illustration by Istvan Orosz



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David M. Lampton, of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, and Burton Levin, a former ambassador to Burma, have observed that the Communist Party has gone from controlling every facet of daily life in China to controlling the media and the political opposition. Chinese can travel, buy any books and videos they want, open bank accounts, live together if they are gay or unmarried, and so on.

It has been a long time since the Chinese people have experienced such a degree of security and freedom. Early in this century, following the 1911 collapse of the Qing Dynasty, China was roiled by mob violence; the Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek was only the first among equals in a nation ruled by warlords. Then came the Japanese devastation of China in the Second World War, with some 10 million Chinese casualties. In 1949 Mao Zedong's Communists came to power, unleashing decades of mass murder and government-inflicted famine. Now the most liberalizing regime in Chinese history is the one most attacked by the U.S. media, politicians, and intellectuals—the same groups that in many cases tolerated both Mao's and Chiang Kai-shek's abuses.

Westerners defend their intolerance of China's regime by claiming that new standards of behavior now obtain worldwide, owing to the West's victory in the Cold War and heightened concern about human rights. Even by those standards China's leaders might be singled out for qualified praise: they effectively dismantled communism in the 1980s, years before the Berlin Wall collapsed. The Tiananmen uprising was to no small degree a reaction to the economic dislocations caused by China's early post-communism. At present the so-called Communist Party in China has less control of its nation's economy than the governments of France and Italy have of theirs. Russia and some of the prospective members of NATO from the former Warsaw Pact have yet to undergo the kind of entrepreneurial revolution China has already accomplished. Indeed, if the country is not liberalizing fast enough, that's news to Motorola, which assumes that China will be the world's biggest market for cell phones in the early twenty-first century.

Whereas the media often reduce China to a government that oppresses dissidents, the real story is almost the reverse: in fostering economic success since 1989, Chi-

na's rulers have unleashed social forces that significantly weaken their control. As in the late Ming and late Qing Dynasties, there has been tremendous population growth. The one-child policy collapsed more than a decade ago, and China's population may now be close to 1.5 billion. Population pressure on arable land has led to scarcity and to farmers' revolts against corrupt officials. As the amount of arable land shrinks, the regime cannot prevent many millions of citizens from migrating to urban areas. Yet, as Goldstone points out, urban growth will only expand the numbers and the leverage of the students and business elites who are likely to demand further democratization. Thus, like previous Chinese dynasties, this one will be increasingly beset by both poor farmers and wealthy merchants. The near-double-digit annual growth in China's gross domestic product has generated a new subproletariat of low-paid factory and construction laborers—a historically volatile class, full of frustrated ambition and yearning. The more than 100 million unemployed workers could still bring chaos on a significant scale. Drug smuggling, gambling, prostitution, pickpocketing, and other criminal activities flourish. The issue is not how much control the Beijing regime has but how little.

Given that China is chronically short of water and has one of the highest air-pollution indexes in the world, and also that two thirds of the population lives in flood zones, Party rulers have little margin for error. For all China's problems the West has the same easy answer it had during the violence of the warlord-dominated 1920s: democracy. But democracy in a country with roughly five times the population of the United States, a tiny middle class, and grave ethnic disputes could shred the relative social peace that the Party has for the most part maintained during a mammoth economic transition.

■ ■ ■

Western intellectuals long fixated on Europe see Chinese authoritarianism through the distorting lenses of German Nazism and Russian communism. They forget that all political systems take their attributes from the cultures to which they are applied. Russian communism, for instance, was determined less by Karl Marx than by the effect of the absolutist Eastern Orthodox Church on turn-of-the-century Russian intellectuals and political

radicals. Chinese communism, at least since Mao's death, in 1976, has been influenced by Confucian pragmatism. The comparisons some right-wing commentators make between the rise of Hitler's Germany and the re-emergence of China are invidious. From the moment Hitler achieved power, he steadily narrowed the scope of individual freedom; China's rulers have expanded it.

After a 200-year hiatus—since the Qing Dynasty began to weaken, in the early nineteenth century—China is returning to the world stage as a great power. That may be usual for China, but it is unusual for the West, given that the last period of Chinese greatness occurred when countries were far more isolated than they are today. As the recent revelations of Chinese nuclear spying in the United States demonstrate, ascendant powers tend to be particularly aggressive and crude. Moreover, they will use any opportunity to undermine their adversaries. NATO's accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade may have briefly provided Beijing's rulers with extra leverage to use against us in human-rights and trade negotiations—but that leverage disappeared when the full extent of Chinese nuclear spying was revealed. The United States-China relationship, so prone to cultural and historical misinterpretation, could be among the most unstable great-power relationships in history.

The political and demographic direction Chinese civilization takes will significantly affect world politics in the twenty-first century. Continued central rule from Beijing over such a vast and increasingly populous nation may require more tyranny, not less. But because more tyranny would ignite further strife, China may well separate into economic fiefdoms, organized around great urban regions such as Shanghai, in the north, and Kunming, in southern China's Yunnan Province, whose economic power is extending into Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand. "The future of China may resemble that of Classical Greece, with its rival cities, blood feuds, and a contest of militarism with commerce," Ralph Peters, a former Army officer and national-security expert, writes in *Fighting for the Future* (1999).

Chinese influence is seeping into more and more of Asia. However justified our positions may be, dealing with China will require cool realpolitik and scholarly know-how, not self-righteous hysteria. ☯

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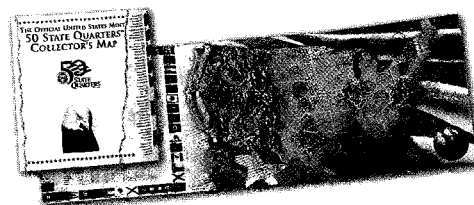
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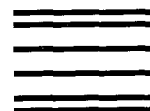


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Can Coffee Drinkers Save the Rain Forest?

*Much of the coffee you drink is "technified";
"sustainable" coffee often tastes better,
besides being a lot better for
the environment*

IT'S a sunny summer morning as three Americans clamber out of the back of a gray pickup truck, following a tall Guatemalan farmer named Martin Keller toward a row of coffee plants. Armed with notebooks, the Americans scribble furiously as the Guatemalan points with pride

by Jennifer Bingham Hull

to the plants' bright-green cherries. Like a number of Guatemala's large coffee farmers, Keller is of German descent; three generations of his family worked Finca Santa Isabel before him. High in the hills in the department of Santa Rosa, southeast of Guatemala City, the air is cool and sweet and the

setting picturesque, with soaring cedar trees sheltering a ravine thick with laurel, cuernavaca, oak, and inga. For a week David Griswold, Lindsey Bolger, and Betsy Buckley, all coffee buyers, have been scouring the hills of Costa Rica and Guatemala in search of shade-grown, habitat-friendly coffee. An importer based in Emeryville, California, Griswold runs Sustainable Harvest, a company that specializes in shade and organic coffee. Bolger, who is one of his clients, is the green-coffee buyer for Batdorf & Bronson, a roasting house in Olympia, Washington, that sells the fancy specialty coffees so popular now at coffeehouses like Starbucks. Buckley buys coffee from Bolger for her three Aurora cafés, in Atlanta, Georgia. All are relatively small operators who see selling shade coffee as good both for the environment and for business.

Finca Santa Isabel was the second plantation to be certified by "ECO-O.K.," one of several new environmental labels for coffee, which is backed by the Rainforest Alliance. The plantation isn't perfect from a naturalist's point of view: in parts the shade trees are sparse and consist of just a few species. Like most big coffee farmers, Keller uses some chemicals. And Finca Santa Isabel, a large plantation, is a far cry from the small cooperatives that fair traders—those committed to paying coffee farmers a fair price for their product—support. But the plantation has shade trees, virgin forest, and an ecologically sound mill, and the Kellers are conservationists. When the Americans ask if Keller will put in fruit and flowering trees to attract more birds, he agrees.

Recently the impact of coffee growing on the environment has been much debated in the specialty-coffee industry, with labels such as Song Bird Coffee and Sanctuary Coffees surfacing in the market. The movement shows promise for one simple, market-driven reason: it asserts that people can have their coffee just the way they like it and also save the rain forest. Indeed, some believe that Americans' growing taste for fine coffee could help to reverse an agricultural fiasco that has turned one of the world's most benign crops into an enemy of the environment. "All we have to do is get just a small fraction of North Americans and Europeans to demand shade-grown coffee, and we

can push the industry back and save tremendous amounts of habitat," says Chris Wille, the ECO-O.K. director for the Rainforest Alliance. "And no one has to sacrifice anything."

As traditionally grown, under a canopy of shade trees and amid other vegetation, coffee is an environment-friendly crop. The shade trees fix nitrogen in the soil, fostering the growth of the coffee bushes, and their fallen leaves provide nutrients, further reducing the need for chemical fertilizers. The mixture of vegetation prevents erosion and protects the coffee from harsh weather. In contrast to corn and cattle, which almost always require clear-cutting, coffee can be grown in relative harmony with the rain forest.

Recently, however, many coffee farmers in northern Latin America have reduced or eliminated shade to grow new high-yielding coffee plants under direct sun. Fear of a disease known as coffee leaf rust sparked an early round of conversions, most of which took place in the 1970s. To prevent the spread of the disease, coffee farmers "technified," replacing older, shade-loving coffee varieties, such as *típica* and *bourbón*, with new varieties, packed in tight hedgerows, that can survive open sun—but only with chemical inputs.

Coffee leaf rust never turned out to be a major problem for Latin America. But sun coffee's high yields soon began to be seen as a major advantage. To boost farmers' incomes, the U.S. Agency for International Development spent some \$80

of Colombia's coffee and nearly 40 percent of Costa Rica's. In places including Mexico, Colombia, and parts of Central America and the Caribbean some 30 to 40 percent of all coffee land had been converted to modern reduced-shade systems by the early 1990s. Some countries, like El Salvador, missed the boat, their desultory attempts to convert slowed by war and revolution.

LATELY scientists have begun to raise questions about sun coffee, focusing on the effects that technification has had in northern Latin America. For developing countries, coffee is the second most important export commodity, after oil, and it is the United States' largest legal import from Latin America. In this region the crop grows mostly in middle-altitude tropical forests. These areas contain some of the highest levels of biodiversity in the world, providing habitat for many of the planet's plant and animal species. They also have some of the world's highest deforestation rates, and some scientists assert that conversion to sun coffee is contributing to the deforestation.

In recent years the populations of many of the migratory birds familiar to Americans have declined drastically. The North American Breeding Bird Survey shows an annual drop of two to six percent from 1980 to 1994 for the Baltimore oriole, the Tennessee warbler, and the Cape May warbler. Other migratory birds have suffered similarly. These birds winter in northern Latin America and summer in North America. Scientists attribute their decline partly to the destruction of forests throughout the hemisphere.

Naturalists have long viewed shade coffee as an important habitat for wildlife, especially compared with other crops. From 1990 to 1994 a team from the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center found more than 150 species of birds on shade-coffee farms in Chiapas, Mexico, with numbers of migratory species particularly high. Species diversity on well-shaded farms can rival that in a tropical forest. Sun plantations, in contrast, hold little appeal for wildlife. Research in Colombia and Mexico has found that sun farms have just a tenth as many bird species as do shade holdings. "A verdant open-to-the-sun coffee plantation qualifies as a 'green desert,' virtually devoid of bird activity," writes Robert Rice, a policy specialist at the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center.

Sun coffee also requires more agrochemicals than its shaded counterpart. And growers sometimes use chemicals that are banned in the United States. The coffee is considered safe for consumption because the roasting process, at 400°, breaks down whatever chemical residues are left on the coffee. However, in Latin America, where environmental regulations are often unenforced, the chemicals have contaminated water supplies and sickened workers.

In addition, the economic advantages of sun coffee are no longer so obvious. Although sun producers, because of large yields, earn more than shade farmers when coffee prices are high, their reliance on chemicals and the techniques of intensive agriculture means that their costs are higher, leaving them more vulnerable than traditional growers to low prices. The world coffee market is volatile, making total dependence on the crop a risky proposition, especially for small farmers. Shade trees can provide fruit and wood for fuel, helping farmers to diversify.

Shade coffee plants also tend to outlive sun trees. "Exposing coffee to sun is like giving the plants a shot of steroids. The sun speeds up photosynthesis, accelerating the plant's growth," says Paul Katzeff, whose company, Thanksgiving Coffee, sells shade-grown Song Bird Coffee. Juiced up, the hungry plant quickly depletes the soil, so that farmers must apply chemical fertilizers to support the plants. All this activity exhausts the coffee plants. "It's living in the fast lane, so the plant lives only fifteen years as opposed to eighty or a hundred," Katzeff explains.

Aware of all this, international agencies have begun promoting shade. Conservation International is supporting organic coffee farmers in Mexico, using their shaded holdings to buffer important wildlife areas. The group is launching a similar project in Colombia, with the support of the powerful Colombian Coffee Federation. In heavily deforested El Salvador the World Bank is financing a shade-coffee project to promote biodiversity. USAID is helping Haitian farmers plant shade trees to grow gourmet Haitian *Bleu* coffee, and supporting organic-coffee projects in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Largely grown under shade trees, organic coffee sells at a premium. By going organic, USAID's small farmers have tripled their incomes.

An agricultural fiasco has turned one of the most benign crops into an enemy of the environment.

million from the 1970s to the early 1990s, according to a 1996 report from the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and the Natural Resources Defense Council, to help growers in Central America and the Caribbean technify. In countries where USAID was not involved, national coffee federations promoted the change, supporting the technification of 69 percent

TO most Americans, however, shade coffee's appeal lies in its taste. Processing, altitude, and climate significantly affect coffee flavor. However, variety is also important. Whereas sun plantations grow new high-yield coffee varieties, the vintage típica and bournón varieties that many experts prefer grow in shade. "Most people in our industry feel that the new high-yield varieties are simply not as good in the cup," says Ted Lingle, the executive director of the Specialty Coffee Association of America. Some also assert that shade itself contributes to taste, for reasons that any gardener can grasp: when a plant matures slowly and produces few berries, as shade bushes do, the berries it does produce tend to be sweet and of high quality. James Stewart, the chairman and founder of Seattle's Best Coffee Company, has been buying coffee from Latin America since the late 1970s. He has perceived a decline in taste as producers have technified. "All the coffees used to have nice different flavors characteristic of the soil," Stewart says. "These hybrids have a tendency to taste the same. They're a little bland, kind of medicinal." Stewart's company has introduced shade-grown and organic coffees.

Technification and the forces that encouraged it help to explain why it was hard for a number of years to get a good cup of coffee in this country. This wasn't always the case. Prior to the 1960s, Lingle explains, U.S. coffee roasters competed primarily on quality, using high-grade arabica beans in their coffees. However, from the 1960s to the 1980s fierce price competition among U.S. roasters encouraged these companies to use lower-grade robusta beans in their blends. To compete, arabica producers technified to improve yields, further contributing to the general decline in coffee quality. "Technification was a response to the industry focus on quantity, not quality," says Lingle.

Fred Houk, a specialty roaster in North Carolina, who in 1996 began selling the line of shade-grown called Sanctuary Coffees, agrees. "Coffee quality in the past fifteen years or so has gone dramatically down, and there's no question that the major reason for that is technification."

THE view from the hilltop overlooking the coffee farm of El Chorro is magnificent. Across a valley of verdant coffee, clouds drape the mountains like long, wispy blankets. On the hilltop a lush forest

canopy shades a patch of coffee. While Griswold videotapes the coffee forest, Buckley photographs the view. After disappearing into the growth, Bolger returns enthusiastic. "I hear about six different kinds of birds in there," she reports.

It's an unusual scene—an importer, a retailer, and a roaster all perched on a producer's mountaintop. Traditionally, coffee buyers haven't traveled to farms. Most roasters buy coffee through chains of brokers, selling it as a blend. With little incentive to keep their products separate, farmers take their coffee to local mills to be mixed with that of their neighbors. Shaded, unshaded—it all goes in the same bag. "Folgers buys coffee from Guatemala," Ted Lingle says. "They don't need to separate their coffee, because they blend it. They are promoting their brand, and their brand is a blend, and the Guatemala component gets lost in their other coffees. So they don't pay extra for separation. In specialty coffee it is the opposite—these differences are quite important, and the specialty industry is willing to pay for them."

Indeed, differentiation is now the name of the game in specialty coffee. When Betsy Buckley opened her first café in Atlanta, few others existed. Then Starbucks came to town, and Buckley nearly went broke. Aurora survived, but the competition has encouraged Buckley to take some extra marketing measures, including selling environment-friendly, or "sustainable," coffee. Aurora now regularly features an environment-friendly coffee. "We're trying to distinguish our business from the competition," Buckley explains.

RECENTLY, sustainable coffee has taken some major steps forward in the marketplace. In a significant development, Starbucks has begun providing financial support for Conservation International's shade-coffee project in Chiapas, Mexico. This month Starbucks will begin offering the Chiapas shade coffee in its stores. In April the specialty retailer introduced an organic coffee from Costa Rica to its customers after market tests showed strong demand for the coffee. Starbucks buys in such large volume that securing constant supplies of environment-friendly coffees may be difficult. But the company says it is now committed to offering these coffees.

Still, sustainable coffee has a long way to go before it takes off among America's coffee drinkers. Most coffee still comes

from big roasters who currently have little commercial reason to take interest in the issue. What's more, shade is just one of the environmental issues involved in coffee growing, making it difficult to define sustainability, as some in the specialty industry are trying to do. Two other critical issues are water pollution, which is a problem on many shade and sun farms,

The diversity of plant and animal life on well-shaded coffee farms can rival that in a tropical forest.

and the use of chemicals, which shade tends to reduce but not necessarily eliminate. In addition, growing practices vary widely. "What is sustainable in one part of the hemisphere is not sustainable in another," Michael Glenister, a specialty-coffee importer with Amcafe, says. Some countries, including Brazil, are not well suited to shade production. Parts of Costa Rica are already shaded by cloud cover and either don't require or can't use shade, which can support fungal growth.

Even where shade works well, not everyone agrees on how much is enough. Depending on how many species and what type of trees are used, what looks environment-friendly to a farmer can appear desertlike to a naturalist. "I no longer draw the line between shade and sun in terms of the benefits to biodiversity," Russell Greenberg, the director of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, says. "Much of the coffee in northern Latin America is called shade, but it's marginal in terms of biodiversity."

Meanwhile, fair traders assert that coffee growing should be beneficial to workers, not just birds. Fair-trade companies eliminate the middlemen, who are notorious for gouging peasant producers. So far, fair trade has not been a focus of discussions about sustainability. Bruce McKinnon, a former marketing director of the fair-trade concern Equal Exchange, says, "While the environment is a very popular issue, as always humans seem to be left to last." ☛



The Population Surprise

The old assumptions about world population trends need to be rethought. One thing is clear: in the next century the world is in for some rapid downsizing

FIFTY years from now the world's population will be declining, with no end in sight. Unless people's values change greatly, several centuries from now there could be fewer people living in the entire world than live in the United States today. The big surprise of the past twenty years is that in not one country did fertility stop falling when it reached the replacement rate—2.1 chil-

by Max Singer

dren per woman. In Italy, for example, the rate has fallen to 1.2. In Western Europe as a whole and in Japan it is down to 1.5. The evidence now indicates that within fifty years or so world population will peak at about eight billion before starting a fairly rapid decline.

Because in the past two centuries world population has increased from one billion to nearly six billion, many people still

fear that it will keep "exploding" until there are too many people for the earth to support. But that is like fearing that your baby will grow to 1,000 pounds because its weight doubles three times in its first seven years. World population was growing by two percent a year in the 1960s; the rate is now down to one percent a year, and if the patterns of the past century don't change radically, it will head into negative numbers. This view is coming to be widely accepted among population experts, even as the public continues to focus on the threat of uncontrolled population growth.

As long ago as September of 1974 *Scientific American* published a special issue on population that described what demographers had begun calling the "demographic transition" from traditional high rates of birth and death to the low ones of modern society. The experts believed that birth and death rates would be more or less equal in the future, as they had been in the past, keeping total population stable after a level of 10–12 billion people was reached during the transition.

"To most American eyes, these look like poverty neighborhoods,
but this is the snapshot view; in the video version

**they are the first
frames on the way
to prosperity,**

the first way-station on the
Santa Ana and San Bernardino
Freeways to middle-income
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Developments over the past twenty years show that the experts were right in thinking that population won't keep going up forever. They were wrong in thinking that after it stops going up, it will stay level. The experts' assumption that population would stabilize because birth rates would stop falling once they matched the new low death rates has not been borne out by experience. Evidence from more than fifty countries demonstrates what should be unsurprising: in a modern society the death rate doesn't determine the birth rate. If in the long run birth rates worldwide do not conveniently match death rates, then population must either rise or fall, depending on whether birth or death rates are higher. Which can we expect?

The rapid increase in population during the past two centuries has been the result of lower death rates, which have produced an increase in worldwide life expectancy from about thirty to about sixty-two. (Since the maximum—if we do not change fundamental human physiology—is about eighty-five, the world has already gone three fifths as far as it can in increasing life expectancy.) For a while the result was a young population with more mothers in each generation, and fewer deaths than births. But even during this population explosion the average number of children born to each woman—the fertility rate—has been falling in modernizing societies. The prediction that world population will soon begin to decline is based on almost universal human behavior. In the United States fertility has been falling for 200 years (except for the blip of the Baby Boom), but partly because of immigration it has stayed only slightly below replacement level for twenty-five years.

Obviously, if for many generations the birth rate averages fewer than 2.1 children per woman, population must eventually stop growing. Recently the United Nations Population Division estimated that 44 percent of the world's people live in countries where the fertility rate has already fallen below the replacement rate, and fertility is falling fast almost everywhere else. In Sweden and Italy fertility has been below replacement level for so long that the population has become old enough to have more deaths than births. Declines in fertility will eventually increase the average age in the world, and will cause a decline in world population forty to fifty years from now.

Because in a modern society the death rate and the fertility rate are largely independent of each other, world population need not be stable. World population can be stable only if fertility rates around the world average out to 2.1 children per woman. But why should they average 2.1, rather than 2.4, or 1.8, or some other number? If there is nothing to keep each country exactly at 2.1, then there is nothing to ensure that the overall average will be exactly 2.1.

The point is that the number of children born depends on families' choices about how many children they want to raise. And when a family is deciding whether to have another child, it is usually thinking about things other than the national or the world population. Who would know or care if world population were to drop from, say, 5.85 billion to 5.81 billion? Population change is too slow and remote for people to feel in their lives—even if the total population were to double or halve in only a century (as a mere 0.7 percent increase or decrease each year would do). Whether world population is increasing or decreasing doesn't necessarily affect the decisions that determine whether it will increase or decrease in the future. As the systems people would say, there is no feedback loop.

WHAT does affect fertility is modernity. In almost every country where people have moved from traditional ways of life to modern ones, they are choosing to have too few children to replace themselves. This is true in Western and in Eastern countries, in Catholic and in secular societies. And it is true in the richest parts of the richest countries. The only exceptions seem to be some small religious communities. We can't be sure what will happen in Muslim countries, because few of them have become modern yet, but so far it looks as if their fertility rates will respond to modernity as others' have.

Nobody can say whether world population will ever dwindle to very low numbers; that depends on what values people hold in the future. After the approaching peak, as long as people continue to prefer saving effort and money by having fewer children, population will continue to decline. (This does not imply that the decision to have fewer children is selfish; it may, for example, be motivated by a desire to do more for each child.)

Some people may have values signifi-

cantly different from those of the rest of the world, and therefore different fertility rates. If such people live in a particular country or population group, their values can produce marked changes in the size of that country or group, even as world population changes only slowly. For example, the U.S. population, because of immigration and a fertility rate that is only slightly below replacement level, is likely to grow from 4.5 percent of the world today to 10 percent of a smaller world over the next two or three centuries. Much bigger changes in share are possible for smaller groups if they can maintain their difference from the average for a long period of time. (To illustrate: Korea's population could grow from one percent of the world to 10 percent in a single lifetime if it were to increase by two percent a year while the rest of the world population declined by one percent a year.)

World population won't stop declining until human values change. But human values may well change—values, not biological imperatives, are the unfathomable variable in population predictions. It is quite possible that in a century or two or three, when just about the whole world is at least as modern as Western Europe is today, people will start to value children more highly than they do now in modern societies. If they do, and fertility rates start to climb, fertility is no more likely to stop climbing at an average rate of 2.1 children per woman than it was to stop falling at 2.1 on the way down.

In only the past twenty years or so world fertility has dropped by 1.5 births per woman. Such a degree of change, were it to occur again, would be enough to turn a long-term increase in world population of one percent a year into a long-term decrease of one percent a year. Presumably fertility could someday increase just as quickly as it has declined in recent decades, although such a rapid change will be less likely once the world has completed the transition to modernity. If fertility rises only to 2.8, just 33 percent over the replacement rate, world population will eventually grow by one percent a year again—doubling in seventy years and multiplying by twenty in only three centuries.

The decline in fertility that began in some countries, including the United States, in the past century is taking a long time to reduce world population because when it started, fertility was very much

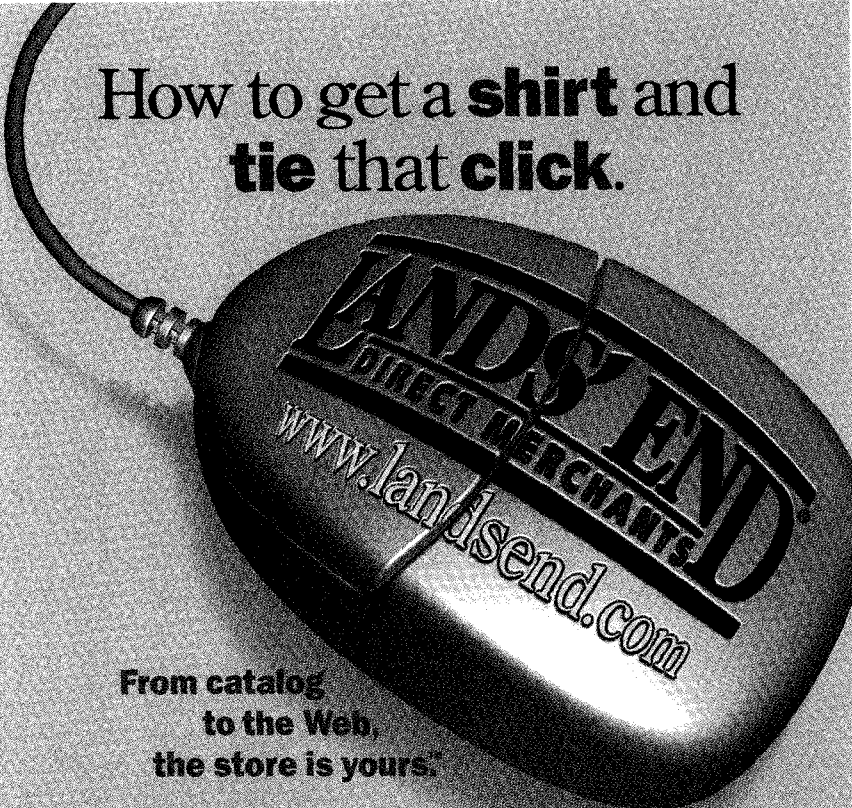
higher than replacement level. In addition, because a preference for fewer children is associated with modern societies, in which high living standards make time valuable and children financially unproductive and expensive to care for and educate, the trend toward lower fertility couldn't spread throughout the world until economic development had spread. But once the whole world has become modern, with fertility everywhere in the neighborhood of replacement level, new social values might spread worldwide in a few decades. Fashions in families might keep changing, so that world fertility bounced above and below replacement rate. If each bounce took only a few decades or generations, world population would stay within a reasonably narrow range—although probably with a long-term trend in one direction or the other.

The values that influence decisions about having children seem, however, to change slowly and to be very widespread. If the average fertility rate were to take a long time to move from well below to well above replacement rate and back again, trends in world population could go a long way before they reversed themselves. The result would be big swings in world population—perhaps down to one or two billion and then up to 20 or 40 billion.

Whether population swings are short and narrow or long and wide, the average level of world population after several cycles will probably have either an upward or a downward trend overall. Just as averaging across the globe need not result in exactly 2.1 children per woman, averaging across the centuries need not result in zero growth rather than a slowly increasing or slowly decreasing world population. But the long-term trend is less important than the effects of the peaks and troughs. The troughs could be so low that human beings become scarcer than they were in ancient times. The peaks might cause harm from some kinds of shortages.

One implication is that not even very large losses from disease or war can affect the world population in the long run nearly as much as changes in human values do. What we have learned from the dramatic changes of the past few centuries is that regardless of the size of the world population at any time, people's personal decisions about how many children they want can make the world population go anywhere—to zero or to 100 billion or more. ☉

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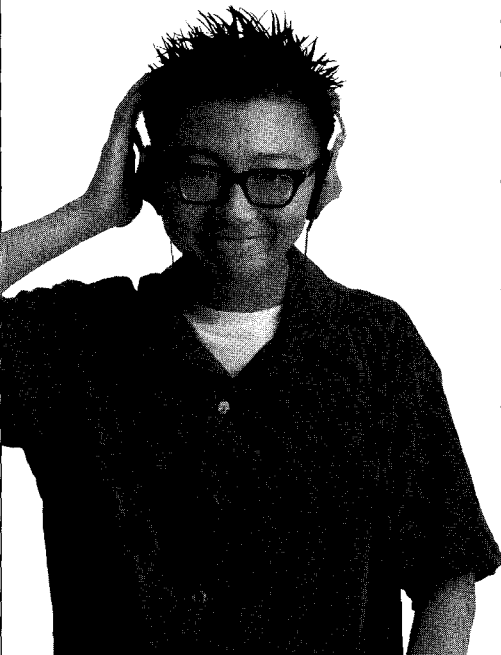
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Ubud, the Heart of Bali

This part of Indonesia remains welcoming and serene

TOURISM to Bali began in the early 1920s, when the Royal Dutch Steam Packet Company added the island to its itinerary. By 1930 there were about a hundred visitors a year; a decade later the figure was 250. The ships stopped off the north coast, where passengers were ferried to shore

first aboard tenders and then on the backs of Balinese men. Most visitors would traverse the island by motor car to the capital city of Denpasar, in the south, where they stayed at the luxurious Bali Hotel, opened in 1927.

Discriminating travelers, however, headed for the green hills of the interior, to

visit the principedom of Ubud. There was no hotel in Ubud: travelers stayed in the bungalows that Prince Gde Agung Sukawati had built for the circle of artists he patronized. What was surely the most exotic art colony in the world at that time began with the arrival of Walter Spies, a Moscow-born German artist and musician who came to Bali for a visit in 1927 and stayed there until the Second World War, when he became a prisoner of war in the Dutch-controlled East Indies. In Ubud he encountered a culture as graceful and refined as any in the world, where everyone, it seemed, was an artist of one sort or another and child dancers in mystic trances enacted the fables of the Hindu classic *Ramayana* to the exuberant, clangorous accompaniment of a gamelan.

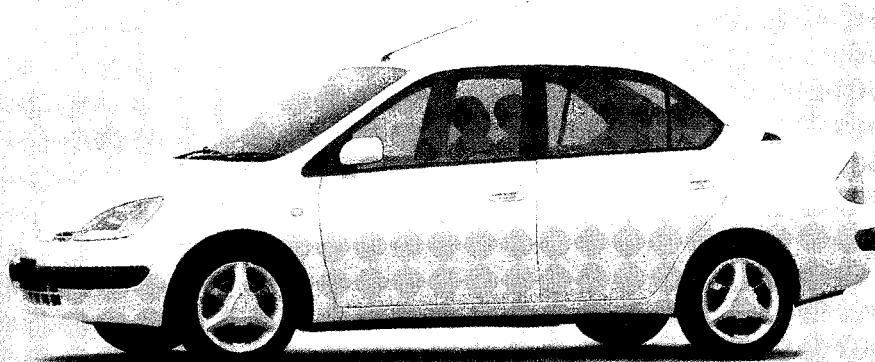
One early visitor to Ubud, Noel Coward, had his traveling companion, Charlie Chaplin, in mind when he wrote this bit of doggerel verse:

As I said this morning to Charlie,
There is far too much music in Bali.
And although as a place it's
entrancing,

Fields of rice descend a hillside

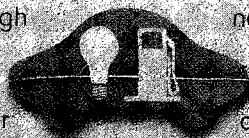


DENIS WAUGH/TONY STONE TOP: JERRY ALEXANDER/TONY STONE



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There is also a thought too much dancing.
It appears that each Balinese native
From the womb to the tomb is creative,
And although the results are quite clever,
There is too much artistic endeavor.

Today Bali welcomes thousands of foreign visitors every day. After the political upheavals in other parts of Indonesia last year, tourism dropped off temporarily, but Australians and Japanese, who constitute about half the island's visitors, are back in throngs. They know that regardless of what's going on in Jakarta and elsewhere, Bali remains as safe as can be: even as Indonesia's political and economic future remains cloudy, the Balinese, famous throughout the archipelago for their hospitable, easygoing ways, have maintained their wonted serenity.

Most tourists here are young travelers on a budget, who have turned the beaches south of Denpasar into a hell of traffic jams, raucous pubs, peddlers—and, yes, pickpockets and prostitutes. At the opposite end of the tourism spectrum are those who stay at one of Bali's many luxury resorts, where it's possible to spend as much as \$1,000 a night to stay in a walled villa, and be served champagne and foie gras beside one's own private swimming pool. Yet today, just as in the days of the Royal Dutch Steam Packet Company, discriminating travelers—those who may not see the need to travel so far from home for loud bars or French food—come to Ubud, the heart of Bali.

I won't mislead you: Ubud is anything but undiscovered. On any afternoon most of the faces on its main streets are foreign, and most of the Balinese you meet are offering transport or other services (though, fortunately, the scene is far more subdued here than in the south). Yet it's still possible for even the lazy traveler—and Bali will have failed you if you don't soon lapse into a tranquil languor—to stray from the touristic path and discover the enchanted place that seduced Walter Spies and the glittery visitors who passed through.

THERE'S no better place to begin than the Hotel Tjampuhan (phone 011-62-361-975369, fax 975137), built on the site of Walter Spies's home. The hotel, which is owned by the sons of Prince Sukawati, is a funny old place.

Much of the romance of the bamboo- and teak-finished rooms derives from inadequate lighting. (Bali, generally speaking, is a low-wattage island.) The service is a little erratic too: there was no stationery in my room, so I called the front desk to ask for some. Ten minutes later a man appeared at my door under a dripping umbrella, holding two sheets of writing paper as limp as boiled cabbage leaves.

Never mind—the site is exquisite. Tjampuhan, the old-fashioned spelling of Campuan, means “place where two rivers meet.” The hotel's bungalows and guest rooms are arrayed along a steep ravine overlooking a turbulent river that rushes between rocky crags to meet its mate. Winding paths lead through the hotel's lush, sprawling garden, past lily ponds and shrines. On the opposite bank, perched just below terraced rice fields, is the ancient temple where the royal family of Ubud worships and performs its rituals. (Officially, there's no royalty in Indonesia now, but Bali doesn't pay much attention to rules.)

I find that jet lag often conduces to discovery. On the first morning of my most recent visit to Ubud I awoke before dawn. Knowing that it would be impossible to go back to sleep, I dressed and strayed out into the streaky gray mist for a wander. I met Wayan, the “room boy,” a lithe, quick-eyed man in his mid-thirties who had introduced himself the night before, when I checked in. He was in the garden gathering hibiscus flowers, which would be artfully tucked behind the ears of sculptured deities or scattered across bed sheets for romantic effect. I asked him how to get to the river, and he immediately set down his basket and led the way, along hairpin pebble pathways and then down a crude wooden staircase. It had rained during the night, so the river dashed ferociously through the gap. A forty-foot waterfall splashed noisily at the first bend in the river.

Wayan didn't stop there. He skipped

across the water on a broad plank bridge and led the way up a steep dirt path to the crest of the ridge opposite the hotel. Here he pointed down a narrow lane lined with bamboo, and said, “You can walk.” I thanked him and did as he suggested. Rice fields were on one side of the lane, the roaring river gorge on the other. A mother duck and her brood fell in behind me, gently gabbling to one another as they followed me to the end of the fields. Eventually I made my way past the royal temple to an old Dutch suspension bridge, just down the main road from the Hotel Tjampuhan.

No place in the world could be greener than Ubud. *Everything* here is green: the young rice fields glow a fluorescent shade of emerald; the thick curtains of foliage appear all the greener for the scarlet accents of ginger and hibiscus. Things that began another color—brick walls or pebble walkways—soon become green with shaggy moss. Even the air has a pale-green cast: the moisture suspended in it picks up the pervasive glow of the verdure. The Balinese have long called their island “the morning of the world.” It's an extravagant phrase, but that morning I had an inkling of what they were talking about.

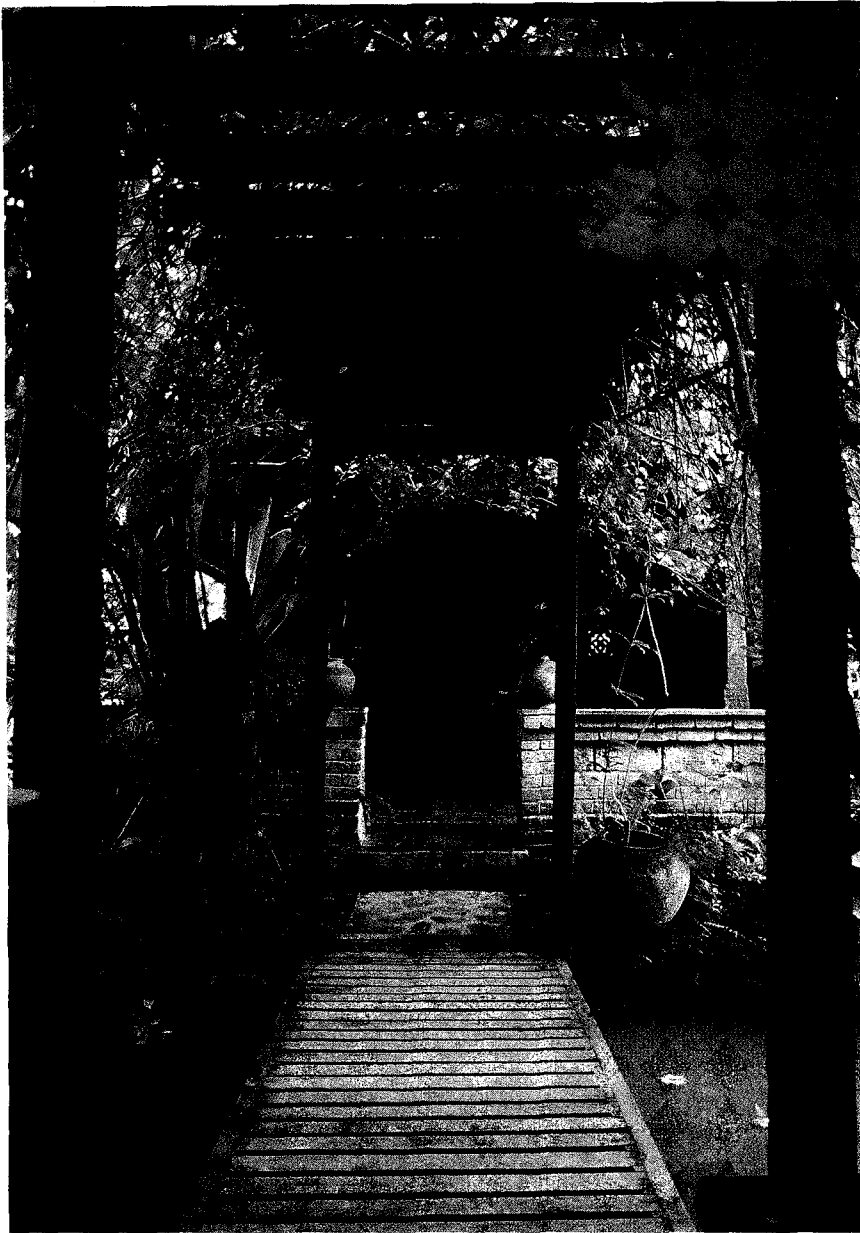
Another verbal extravagance, beloved of travel writers whose descriptive powers have deserted them, is the word “magical”; usually it's just hyperbole for “especially pretty.” Yet there really is magic in

Ubud. When Balinese people lose something, they consult a *balian*, a benign sort of sorcerer, who tells them where to find it. *Balians* can interpret dreams, cure sickness, go into trances, and speak in the voices of ancestors. And magic, in the form of the island's unique religion, is at the core of Bali's arts. A blend of Hinduism and nature worship, the Bali-

nese religion is an ecstatic union of the spiritual and the aesthetic, reminiscent of the religion of ancient Greece. Bali's famous trance dances, for example, suggest the rites of Bacchus: in one of the *sanghyang* dances two girls who are sup-



BOYD NORTON



BOYD NORTON

In Ubud, a hotel entry. Left: a floral tribute to a deity

posedly untrained in the dance's intricate choreography go into a trance and, eyes firmly shut, move in perfect unison. The dance is named after the divine spirit that inhabits them.

WHEN Walter Spies arrived in Bali, he found a culture completely devoted to art, yet to which the notion of art for art's sake was alien. The Balinese have no word for "artist"; painting, carving stone and wood, weaving, playing a musical instrument, and, above all, dancing were just what one did when not fishing or working in the rice fields.

It is an axiom of art history that what

used to be known as primitive art had a profound influence on the emergence of modernism in twentieth-century Europe. In Bali, Europe returned the favor: Spies had an uncanny affinity for the Balinese sensibility, and he thoroughly transformed the arts of the island in the fourteen years he lived there. The famous school of painting in Ubud, one of the principal attractions for people from every part of the world, was virtually his invention.

Traditionally the Balinese considered painting to be among the lowest of the arts; such painting as was done before Spies came was comparatively unsophisticated, consisting mainly of astrological calendars and scenes from the *wayang*, the mythological shadow-puppet

show popular throughout the archipelago. Painters were limited by convention and by the natural pigments, such as bone, soot, and clay, that were available to them.

Spies, later joined by the Dutch artist Rudolf Bonnet, introduced Balinese artists to the wider range of colors of Western painting, and to the variety of effects possible with ready-made brushes and fine-woven canvas. More important, Spies and Bonnet introduced Western techniques, like perspective, and encouraged their students to venture beyond the traditional mythological subject matter and paint scenes from everyday life. Lest the two be accused of tampering with tradition, it should be pointed out that Balinese art, while formulaic, was never opposed to individual expressiveness; the island's most famous artist, I Gusti Nyoman Lempad, had begun to innovate stylistically before Spies's arrival.

As far as I know, there has never been another case of one person's having such a profound impact on the arts of a foreign culture. The best-known dance of Bali, the *kecak*, in which a chorus of men lie in a circle, loudly chanting "chak-a-chak-a-chak" as elaborately costumed soloists act out a tale from the *Ramayana*, was choreographed in its present form by Spies, in 1931. Originally the chorus was much smaller, and performed in a trance, but Spies wanted to create something more dramatic for a film he was working on—Victor Baron von Plessen's *Island of Demons*, an early effort to capture the romance of Bali and convey it abroad.

Ubud in the 1930s was among the most chic bohemian destinations in the world. Chaplin is said to have been disappointed that Balinese girls were not as promiscuous as their bare-breasted condition suggested. Margaret Mead and her lover, Gregory Bateson, got married on a ship steaming toward Bali, where they dropped in on Spies. Ruth Draper visited for a while, no doubt reciting her droll monologues for everyone after dinner. Most flamboyant of all was the heiress Barbara Hutton, who fell violently in love with Spies and dragged him off to Cambodia to see Angkor Wat. With the money she paid him for some paintings, he built her a bungalow and a swimming pool next to his house, but by the time it was finished, she had moved on to Persia. (Guests at the Hotel Tjam-

puhan may stay in this bungalow; the swimming pool is now a lily pond.)

Spies, however, was sexually inclined in a different way, with disastrous results. The Dutch authorities, scandalized at the general moral laxity of foreigners in Ubud, and as part of a crackdown on homosexuals throughout the colony, arrested Spies on New Year's Eve, 1938, for committing sodomy with a minor. According to his biographer, Hans Rhodius, the Balinese were shocked and puzzled by the arrest, and brought Spies's favorite gamelan to play for him outside the window of his jail cell. The boy's father told the trial judge, "He is our best friend, and it was an honor for my son to be in his company. If both are in agreement, why fuss?"

Spies was released from prison in September of 1939. While war was breaking out in Europe, he threw himself into the study of insects and marine life, turning out some exquisitely observed gouaches of his specimens. After Germany invaded Holland, the following year, all German citizens living in the Dutch East Indies were arrested. Spies, the last German on Bali, was sent to a prison in Sumatra. There he continued painting and organized an orchestra, which he conducted in performances of Rachmaninoff. In 1942, fearful of an imminent Japanese attack, the Dutch authorities put their German captives on a ship for transport to Ceylon. The day after it embarked, the vessel was hit by a Japanese bomb. The Dutch crew abandoned the sinking ship, and left their prisoners to drown, slowly and horribly.

THERE is still too much artistic endeavor in Bali, though the scene is not as lively as it once was. The last great burst of creativity came in the early sixties, again at the instigation of a foreigner. In 1960 a Dutch painter named Arie Smit, who had been living in Bali for four years, was strolling through the countryside near Campuan, and came upon some boys who were drawing in the sand. He was struck by their talent, and invited them to his studio. There he gave them paints and brushes and instructed them in technique but made no suggestions as to color or content, and kept his own richly coloristic, Matisse-influenced paintings out of sight. The results, which became known as the Young Artists movement, were vigorous genre scenes, often broad-

ly humorous, rendered in bright, flat colors with strong contours.

Smit lives in a bungalow at a small hotel next door to the Museum Neka, one of the best museums in Indonesia, where many of his paintings are on display. Now eighty-three, Smit is a big, tall man, with the benevolent, well-shaped head of a Rembrandt prophet. He welcomed the opportunity I provided to talk about old times in Bali. He told me about a Waterman fountain-pen heiress who dressed her servants in gold livery. While Margaret Mead was a guest of Smit's, Buckminster Fuller came for a visit to the island; the two luminaries conceived an instant and intense dislike for each other.

When I asked Smit to characterize the contemporary art scene in Bali, he laughed and said, "Confused." He recommended a young artist named I Gusti Agung Wiranata, who paints in the brooding, dramatic style of Walter Spies. "People criticize him, saying he only copies Spies," Smit said. "But he has succeeded in making better paintings than Spies, because he is Balinese." He told me I would find some of Wiranata's work at the Museum Puri Lukisan, Ubud's other art museum, which was founded in the early fifties by Rudolf Bonnet and Prince Sukawati.

The Puri Lukisan's collection is excellent, with a particularly strong holding of I Gusti Nyoman Lempad's work, but the gardens are so lovely that I could hardly bring myself to go indoors to look at the art. A deep gorge at the entrance is spanned by a bridge, which leads to a brick path winding among a series of lily ponds and bowers. When I arrived, some laborers were clearing the hillside in front of the garden, making terraces to plant rice.

I quickly found a fine Wiranata: next to the entrance of one of the galleries hung a round painting, no more than a foot in diameter, of a paddy field at day's end, the sinuous terraces reflecting the extravagant pastels of a Balinese sunset. The style was undeniably close to Spies's, but with a sense of repose that is lacking in the German's work. On my way out I struck up a conversation with the young woman who worked at the postcard pavilion. I asked her if a curator was about, or someone in charge I could speak to. She called out to an old man working in the rice terrace, ankle-deep in mud. After he had washed off his feet and put on a clean shirt, he came over to meet me.

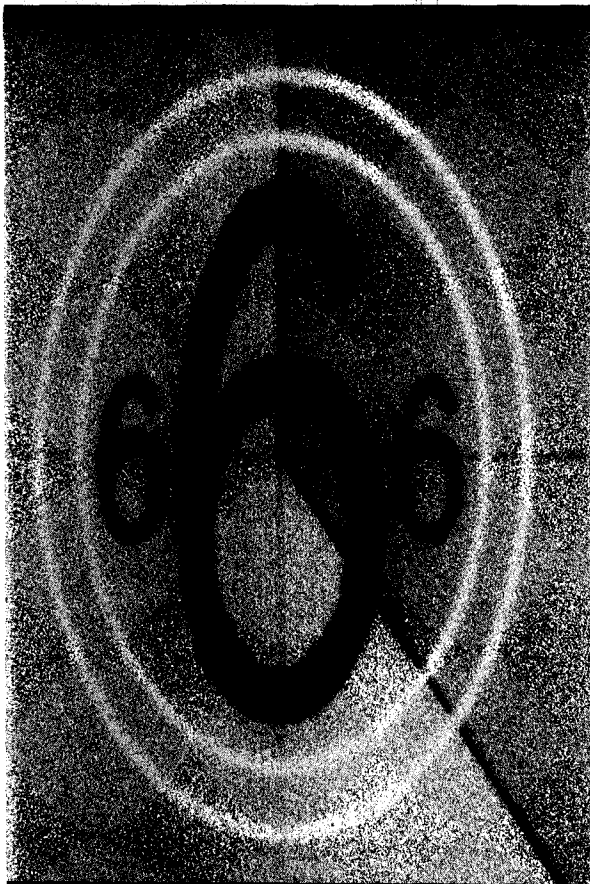
Pak Muning, as he was called, was indeed a curator. He said that he knew Wiranata, and asked if I would like to meet him. I agreed to come back with a car. We drove to a little village about fifteen miles out of Ubud, and found the artist, a handsome young man in his mid-twenties, dozing on his back porch. He received us affably, and asked his wife to prepare coffee for us. I complimented him on his work, and then asked him what was his response to people who said that he copies Walter Spies. He had a pat answer: "If people say I only copy Walter Spies, I say that's okay. Walter Spies came to copy Bali." His father was an artist, Wiranata said, and his uncle was also an artist. Now he lived with his in-laws, and he complained about it, saying he missed Ubud. "A better place for painting, I think." He showed me his studio, a fluorescent-lit cubicle with a boom box and a collection of American rock tapes.

When I returned to the Hotel Tjampuhan, Wayan was making up my room. He told me that he must say good-bye, because he had to go to a cremation; his brother-in-law, a twenty-two-year-old stone carver, had died the day before, buried in a landslide at his outdoor studio, on the bank of the river. His wife, Wayan's sister, was four months pregnant. When I offered my condolences, he shrugged and said, "It was God's will. Good-bye, sir. Please to have a happy life." He bowed and quietly left the room.

Disconcerted, I ordered a coffee from room service and moved to the balcony to watch night fall. I sipped the sweet, strong brew until I came to the mud at the bottom of the cup. The moon was a pale presence behind mottled clouds; a chill crept into the air. Across the ravine I could just make out the slim shapes of worshippers arriving at the temple, their gold and pink satin sarongs glinting in the green gloom. The silvery, slightly hysterical jangle of the gamelan commenced, accompanied by the trumpeting of frogs and the screech of a gecko, melded by the basso continuo of the river torrent.

"Have a happy life": of course it was just a pleasantry. But, I reflected, a man whose job it was to collect hibiscus flowers at dawn, in a river gorge in Ubud, and who could cope with the tragic death of a twenty-two-year-old relative with such equanimity, might have some idea of what that meant. ☸

GREETINGS FROM HOLLYWOOD: Satan's L.A.-based whirling knife gauntlet of artistic castration.



By Cintra Wilson | I entered the theater with my teeth clenched, expecting to see another thing I love infuriatingly drained into flavorless pulp by insecure Hollywood execu-thugs who need to stick their worthless, soul-killing two cents into everything and don't know when to shut up and let the artists do their work. But incredibly, it seems that for once they accidentally chopped together the right combination of
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A POLITICS FOR GENERATION X

by TED HALSTEAD



Today's young adults may be the most politically disengaged in American history. The author explains why, and puts forth a new political agenda that just might galvanize his generation

EVERETT Carll Ladd, a political scientist, once remarked, "Social analysis and commentary has many shortcomings, but few of its chapters are as persistently wrong-headed as those on the generations and generational change. This literature abounds with hyperbole and unsubstantiated leaps from available data." Many of the media's grand pronouncements about America's post-Baby Boom generation—alternatively called Generation X, Baby Busters, and twentysomethings—would seem to illustrate this point.

The 1990s opened with a frenzy of negative stereotyping of the roughly 50 million Americans born from 1965 to 1978: they were slackers, cynics, whiners, drifters, malcontents. A *Washington Post* headline captured the patronizing attitude that Baby Boomers apparently hold toward their successors: "THE BORING TWENTIES: GROW UP, CRYBABIES." Then books and articles began to recast young Americans as

ambitious, savvy, independent, pragmatic, and self-sufficient. For instance, *Time* magazine described a 1997 article titled "Great Xpectations" this way: "Slackers? Hardly. The so-called Generation X turns out to be full of go-getters who are just doing it—but their way."

Stereotyping aside, some disquieting facts jump out regarding the political practices and political orientation of young Americans. A wide sampling of surveys indicates that Xers are less politically or civically engaged, exhibit less social trust or confidence in government, have a weaker allegiance to their country or to either political party, and are more materialistic than their predecessors. Why are so many young people opting out of conventional politics, and what does this mean for the future of American democracy? Might it be that today's political establishment is simply not addressing what matters to the nation's young? And if so, what is their political agenda?

THE DISENGAGED GENERATION

ALTHOUGH political and civic engagement began to decrease among those at the tail end of the Baby Boom, Xers appear to have enshrined political apathy as a way of life. In measurements of conventional political participation the youngest voting-age Americans stand out owing to their unprecedented levels of absenteeism. This political disengagement cannot be explained away as merely the habits of youth, because today's young are markedly less engaged than were their counterparts in earlier generations.

Voting rates are arrestingly low among post-Boomers. In the 1994 midterm elections, for instance, fewer than one in five eligible Xers showed up at the polls. As recently as 1972 half those aged eighteen to twenty-four voted; in 1996, a presidential-election year, only 32 percent did. Such anemic participation can be seen in all forms of traditional political activity: Xers are considerably less likely than previous generations of young Americans to call or write elected officials, attend candidates' rallies, or work on political campaigns. What is more, a number of studies reveal that their general knowledge about public affairs is uniquely low.

The most recent birth cohort to reach voting age is also rejecting conventional partisan demarcations: the distinction between Democrats and Republicans, which has defined American politics for more than a century, doesn't resonate much with the young, who tend to see more similarities than differences between the two parties. Even those young adults who are actively engaged in national politics see partisan boundaries blurring into irrelevance. Gary Ruskin, an Xer who directs the Congressional Accountability Project, a public-policy group in Washington, D.C., puts it this way: "Republicans and Democrats have become one and the same—they are both corrupt at the core and behave like children who are more interested in fighting with each other than in getting anything accomplished."

Surveys suggest that no more than a third of young adults identify with either political party, and only a quarter vote a straight party ticket. Xers are the group least likely to favor maintaining the current two-party system, and the most likely to favor candidates who are running as independents. Indeed, 44 percent of those aged eighteen to twenty-nine identify themselves as independents. Not surprisingly, young adults gave the strongest support to Ross Perot in 1992 and to Jesse Ventura in 1998.

More fundamental, Xers have internalized core beliefs and characteristics that bode ill for the future of American democracy. This generation is more likely to describe itself as having a negative attitude toward America, and as placing little importance on citizenship and national identity, than its predecessors. And Xers exhibit a more materialistic and individualistic streak than did their parents at a similar age. Moreover, there is a general decline in social trust among the young, whether that is trust in their fellow citizens, in established institutions, or

in elected officials. These tendencies are, of course, related: heightened individualism and materialism, as Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out, tend to isolate people from one another, weakening the communal bonds that give meaning and force to notions of national identity and the common good.

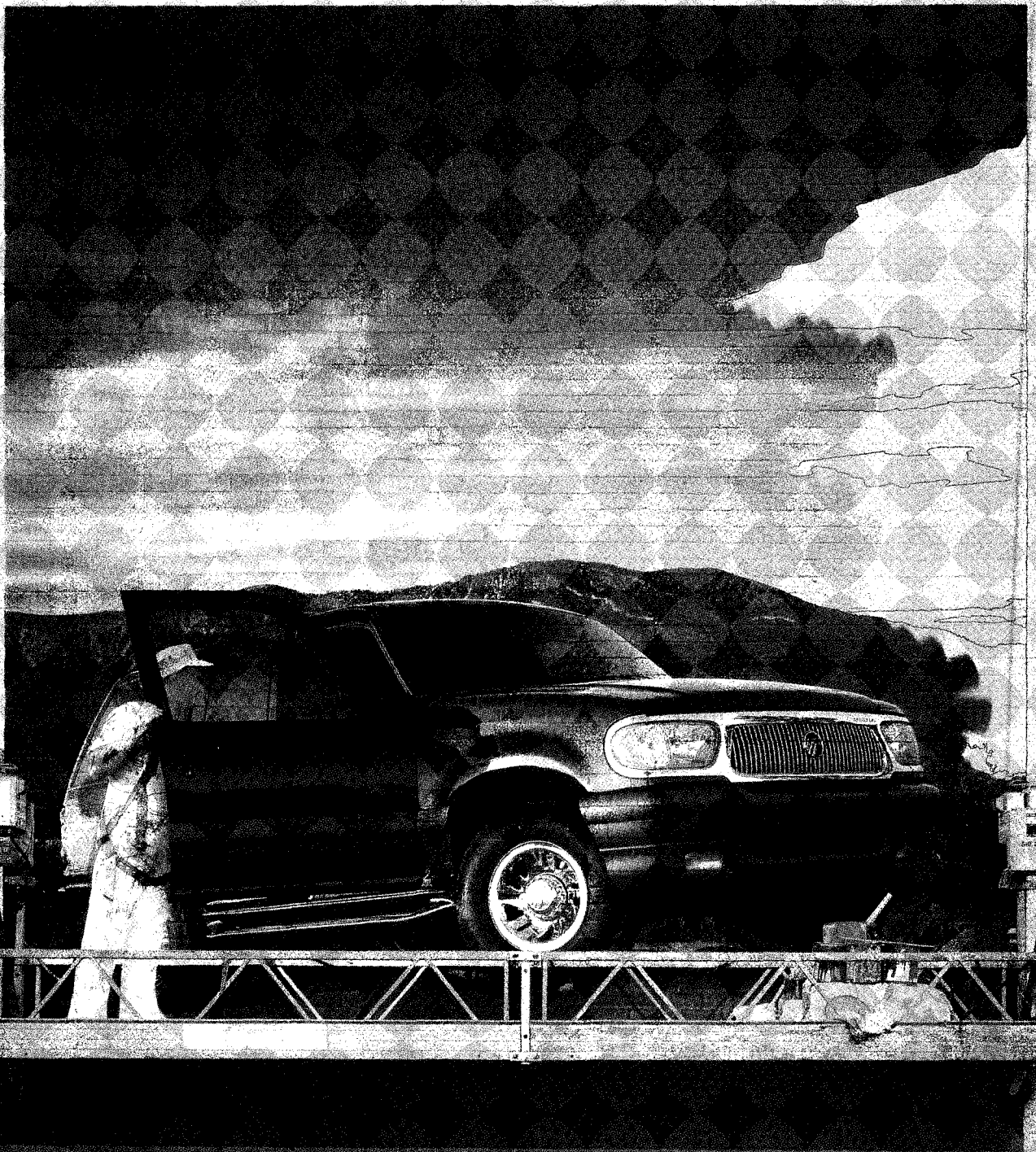
EXPLANATION X

MANY explanations have been advanced for the political apathy of Generation X, but none seems to tell the entire story. One theory holds that television, which the average child now watches for forty hours a week, is to blame for the cynicism and lack of civic education among the young. Another is that growing up during the Reagan and Bush presidencies, when government-bashing was the norm, led many Xers to internalize a negative attitude toward politics and the public sector. A third theory blames the breakdown of the traditional family, in which much of a child's civic sensitivity and partisan orientation is said to develop. And, of course, the incessant scandals in contemporary politics deserve some blame for driving young people into political hiding. Each of these theories undoubtedly holds some truth, but a simpler and more straightforward explanation is possible—namely, that young Americans are reacting in a perfectly rational manner to their circumstances, at least as they perceive them.

As they enter adulthood, this explanation goes, Xers are facing a particularly acute economic insecurity, which leads them to turn inward and pursue material well-being above all else. They see the outlines of very real problems ahead—fiscal, social, and environmental. But in the nation's political system they perceive no leadership on the issues that concern them; rather, they see self-serving politicians who continually indenture themselves to the highest bidders. So Xers have decided, for now, to tune out. After all, they ask, what's the point?

To be sure, today's young have a great deal to be thankful for. Xers have been blessed to come of age in a time of peace and relative material prosperity—itself a significant historical aberration. And the positive legacy they are inheriting goes much deeper: Generation X enjoys the fruits of the civil-rights, women's-rights, and environmental-conservation battles waged by its parents. Finally, who could deny that today's young are benefiting from significant leaps in technology, science, and medicine? But for all these new opportunities, the world being passed on to young Americans is also weighed down by truly bedeviling problems. Prevailing ideologies have proved incapable of accommodating this seeming contradiction.

Ever since the pioneering work on generational theory by the German sociologist Karl Mannheim, in the 1920s, political generations have been thought to arise from the critical events that affect young people when they are most malleable. "Early impressions," Mannheim wrote, "tend to coalesce into a *natural view* of the world." At the very heart of the Xer world view is a deep-seated economic insecurity. In contrast



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to Baby Boomers, most of whom came of age during the period of unparalleled upward mobility that followed the Second World War, Xers grew up in a time of falling wages, shrinking benefits, and growing economic inequality.

Since 1973, while the earnings of older Americans have mostly stagnated, real median weekly earnings for men aged twenty to thirty-four have fallen by almost a third. In fact, Xers may well be the first generation whose lifetime earnings will be less than their parents'. Already they have the weakest middle class of any generation born in this century.

Falling wages and rising inequality have affected all young Americans, regardless of educational achievement. During the said-to-be economically strong years 1989–1995 earnings for recent college graduates fell by nearly 10 percent—represent-

just see a government drifting toward the political equivalent of Chapter 11; they also see a crippled social structure, a dwindling middle class, and a despoiled natural habitat.

Despite bipartisan fanfare about balancing the federal budget, the fiscal outlook remains quite bleak for young adults—and for reasons seldom discussed. Long before Social Security and Medicare go insolvent under the burden of Boomer retirement, entitlement payments will have crowded out the public investments that are essential to ensuring a promising future. Government spending on infrastructure, education, and research has already lessened over the past twenty-five years, from 24 percent to 14 percent of the federal budget, and the downward squeeze will only worsen. In other words, Xers will be forced to pay ever higher taxes for ever fewer government services.

Financially most frightening, however, are the nation's skyrocketing levels of personal debt and international debt. With all the focus on balancing the federal budget, not enough attention has been paid to the fact that American families, and Xers in particular, are increasingly unable to balance their own books.

Xers carry more personal debt than did

any other generation at their age in our nation's history; in fact, a full 60 percent of Xers carry credit-card balances from month to month. In addition, those who attend college face the dual burden of soaring tuition bills and shrinking federal education grants. From 1977 to 1997 the median student-loan debt has climbed from \$2,000 to \$15,000. The combination of lower wages and overleveraged lifestyles is doubly worrisome to a generation that wonders if it will ever collect Social Security.

Then there is America's ballooning international debt. For the past two decades the nation as a whole has consumed more than it has produced, and has borrowed from abroad to cover the difference—nearly \$2 trillion by the end of this decade, or more than a fifth of the total annual output of the U.S. economy. In the short life-span to date of most Xers, America has gone from being the world's largest creditor to being its largest debtor. At some point in the future, especially as interest on our international debt accumulates, investors in other countries will become reluctant to keep bankrolling us. When they do, we will have no choice but to tighten our belts by cutting both investment and consumption. In other words, just as Xers start entering their prime earning years, with their own array of debts and demographic adversities awaiting them, they may well find themselves having to pay off the international debt that Boomers accumulated in the 1980s and 1990s.

Despite the penumbra of long-term debt, the U.S. economy remains the envy of the world; U.S. social conditions, however, are certainly not. America has some of the worst rates of child poverty, infant mortality, teen suicide, crime, family

Xers appear to be calling for a synthesis that unites components thought to be mutually exclusive. Like conservatives, they favor fiscal restraint. Like liberals, they want to help the little guy.

ing the first time that a generation of graduates has earned less than the previous one. And circumstances are far worse for the roughly 67 percent of Xers aged twenty-five to thirty-four who don't have a college degree. In 1997 recent male high school graduates earned 28 percent less (in dollars adjusted for inflation) than did the comparable group in 1973, and recent female high school graduates earned 18 percent less. When politicians and the media continually extol the economy's performance, many Xers just scratch their heads in disbelief.

The economic hardship facing today's young cannot be overstated: America's rate of children in poverty—the highest in the developed world—rose by 37 percent from 1970 to 1995. During the same period the old notions of lifetime employment and guaranteed benefits gave way to the new realities of sudden downsizing and contingent, or temporary, employment. Forty-four million Americans lack basic health insurance today, and Xers—many of whom are part of the contingent work force—are the least insured of all. To compound these problems, many Xers received a poor education in failing public schools, which left them especially ill-prepared to compete in an ever more demanding marketplace.

A LEGACY OF DEBT

BESIDES struggling against downward economic mobility, Generation X is inheriting a daunting array of fiscal, social, and environmental debts. Although most media reports focus on the national debt and the likely future insolvency of Social Security, the real problem is actually much broader. When they envision their future, Xers don't

breakup, homelessness, and functional illiteracy in the developed world. In addition, many of our inner cities have turned into islands of despair, a frightening number of our public schools are dangerous, and almost two million of our residents are behind bars.

Many Xers sense that the basic fabric of American society is somehow fraying. Traditional civic participation, community cohesion, and civility are in decline, and not just among the young. The long-held belief in the value of hard work is under assault, as many Americans work longer hours for less pay, watch the gap between rich and poor grow ever wider, and see their benefits cut by corporations with little allegiance to people or place. The result is a fundamental loss of trust: between citizens and elected officials, between employees and employers, and, ultimately, between individuals and their neighbors. Yet trust and civility are the pillars on which any well-functioning democracy and free-market economy depend.

Finally, Xers face large environmental debts that stem from the use and abuse of our natural resources. Well over half of the world's major fisheries are severely depleted or overfished; loss of species and habitat continues at an unprecedented rate, with some 50,000 plant and animal species disappearing each year; freshwater tables across the globe, including parts of America, are falling precipitously; each year America alone loses more than a million acres of productive farmland to sprawl; and emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases continue to rise, threatening to raise global temperatures by two to six degrees within the next century.

Global warming is a revealing case study from the perspective of Generation X. There is nearly unanimous scientific agreement on the problem, and a consensus among economists that the nation could reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions without harming its economy. In addition, there is ample evidence—ranging from temperature increases to abnormally frequent weather disturbances to icebergs breaking off from the poles—to warrant deep concern. Yet our political establishment has resigned itself to virtual inaction. Why act now, politicians appear to reason, when we can just pass the problem on to our kids?

How, Xers have every right to ask, can one generation justify permanently drawing down the financial, social, and natural capital of another?

But whining will do no good. The only way for Xers to reverse their sad situation—and to realize the promise of the economic opportunities and technological innovations of the next century—is by entering the political arena that they have every reason to loathe. After all, collective problems require collective solutions. Xers cannot reasonably expect the political establishment to address, let alone fix, the sobering problems they are to inherit unless they start participating in the nation's political process, and learn to flex their generational muscle. Whether or not they do so will depend on two more immediate questions: Does this generation share a set of political beliefs? And if so, how might these translate into a political agenda?

“BALANCED - BUDGET POPULISM”

THREE quarters of Generation X agree with the statement “Our generation has an important voice, but no one seems to hear it.” Whatever this voice may be, it does not fit comfortably within existing partisan camps. “The old left-right paradigm is not working anymore,” according to the novelist Douglas Coupland, who coined the term “Generation X.” Neil Howe and William Strauss, who have written extensively on generational issues, have argued in these pages that from the Generation X perspective “America’s greatest need these days is to clear out the underbrush of name-calling and ideology so that simple things can work again.” If Xers have any ideology, it is surely pragmatism.

In an attempt to be more specific Coupland has claimed, “Coming down the pipe are an extraordinarily large number of fiscal conservatives who are socially left.” The underlying assumption here is that the Xer political world view stems simplistically from a combination of the 1960s social revolution and the 1980s economic revolution. This kind of thinking has led some to describe young adults as a generation of libertarians, who basically want government out of their bedrooms and out of their pocketbooks. As it turns out, however, the political views of most Xers are more complex and more interesting than that.

To say that Xers are fiscal conservatives is to miss half the economic story; the other and equally powerful force at play can best be described as economic populism. In fact, the Xer consensus represents a novel hybrid of two distinct currents of economic thought that have rarely combined in the history of American politics. It might well be called “balanced-budget populism.”

On the one hand, many Xers are worried about the debts being loaded onto their future, and therefore support fiscal prudence, balanced budgets, and a pay-as-you-go philosophy. On the other hand, Xers are more concerned than other generations about rising income inequality, and are the most likely to support government intervention to reverse it. The majority believe that the state should do more to help Americans get ahead.

What makes the Generation X economic agenda so surprising is that its two main components have thus far proved to be mutually exclusive in contemporary politics. Fiscal conservatism, widely viewed as the economic philosophy of the Republican right, has generally been accompanied by calls for lower taxes, smaller government, and reduced assistance to the neediest. Meanwhile, concern about the distribution of wealth and helping low-income workers, customarily a pillar of the Democratic left, has been associated with notions of tax-and-spend liberalism and big government. Xers appear to be calling for a new economic synthesis. Like conservatives, they favor fiscal restraint—but unlike the conservative leadership in Congress, only 15 percent believe that America

should use any budget surplus to cut taxes. Like Democrats, they want to help the little guy—but unlike traditional Democrats, they are unwilling to do it by running deficits.

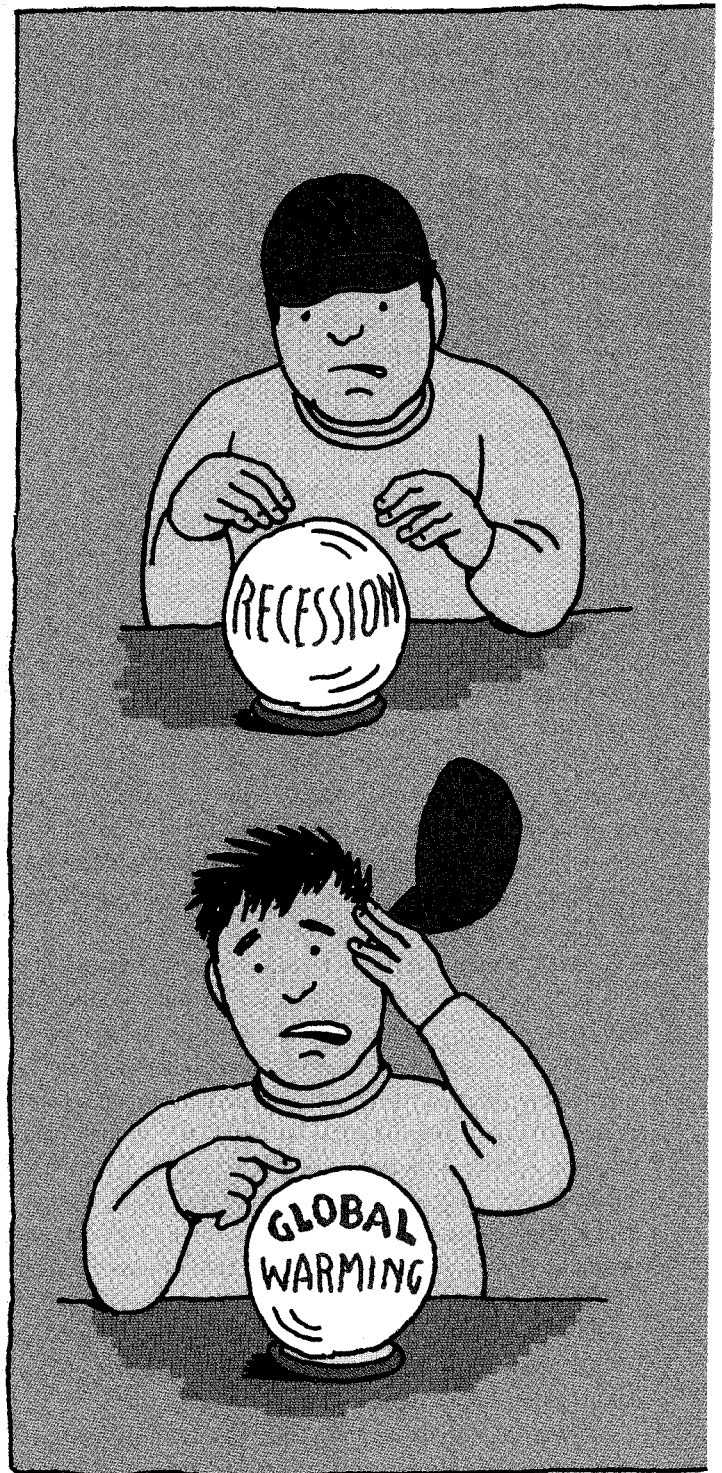
The Generation X social synthesis is no more conventional. Although the young are presumed to be more tolerant and socially permissive than their elders, today's young are returning to religion, have family-oriented aspirations, and are proving to be unsupportive of some traditional liberal programs, among them affirmative action. There are numerous indications that Xers—many of whom grew up without a formal religion—are actively searching for a moral compass to guide their lives, and a recent poll suggests that the highest priority for the majority of young adults is building a strong and close-knit family.

Wade Clark Roof, a professor of religion and society at the University of California at Santa Barbara, who studies the religious life of Generation X, says, "It is too early to predict whether today's young adults will form lasting commitments to particular religious denominations or institutions, but it is quite clear that there is a renewed level of interest in religion and spirituality among the post-Baby Boom generation. Many, in fact, have embarked upon a spiritual quest." As if they were spiritual consumers, young adults are shopping around among a wide range of religious traditions. In the process they are finding new ways to incorporate religion into their daily lives: for instance, church socials are rapidly becoming the new singles scene for Xers who want to combine their devotional and romantic ambitions. A clear majority of older Americans believe that a more active involvement of religious groups in politics is a bad idea, but Xers are divided on the issue.

This revival of spiritual and family-oriented aspirations represents a partial repudiation of the moral relativism that took hold in the 1960s and has since become a mainstay of American pop culture. In essence, many Xers are struggling to find a new values consensus that lies somewhere between the secular permissiveness of the left and the cultural intolerance of the right.

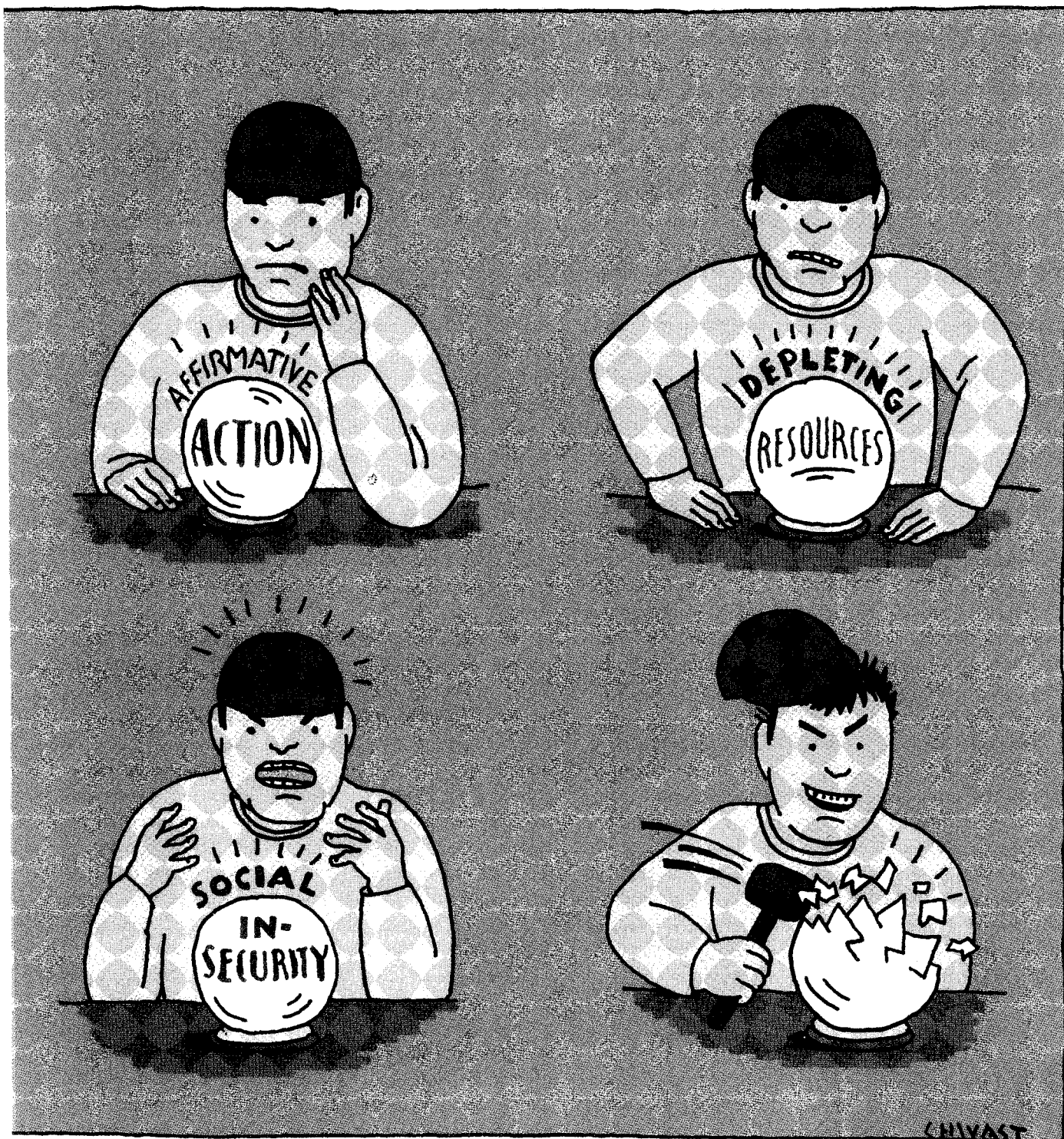
When it comes to race relations, Xers are particularly difficult to categorize. They are the cohort most likely to say that the civil-rights movement has not gone far enough. Yet, like Americans of all ages, they register a high level of opposition to job- and education-related affirmative-action programs. The American National Election Survey has reported that 68 percent of Xers oppose affirmative action at colleges. This seeming paradox can be explained in part by the fact that most Xers—though genuinely concerned about improving race relations—are among the first to have felt the actual (or perceived) bite of the affirmative-action programs that their parents and grandparents put into place.

Improving public education is one of the highest policy priorities for Xers. In fact, when asked what should be done with any future budget surplus, nearly half favor increased education spending. They seem to understand that knowledge



will be the key to success in the information- and service-based economy of the twenty-first century. Their strong emphasis on education betokens a larger belief in the importance of investing in the future. Rather than maintaining the social-welfare state, the Xer philosophy would favor the creation of a social-investment state.

Although Xers have forsaken conventional political participation en masse, it would be a mistake to assume, as many do, that they are wholly apolitical. There is considerable evi-



dence to suggest that volunteerism and unconventional forms of political participation have increased among young adults. Local voluntary activities, demonstrations, and boycotts all seem to be on the rise within their ranks. Heather McLeod, a Generation X co-founder of *Who Cares* magazine, has provided the following explanation: "We can *see* the impact when we volunteer. We know the difference is real." The implication, of course, is that the conventional political system has become so ineffectual and unresponsive that young people

can make a positive difference only by circumventing it.

Xers may be poorly informed when it comes to public affairs, but they know enough to believe that our political system is badly in need of reform. At a very basic level they recognize that the political system is rigged against their interests. For one thing, Xers continually see a large gap between the issues they care most about and the ones that politicians choose to address. For another, they understand that Democrats and Republicans, despite an appearance of per-

petual partisan infighting, collude to favor upper-income constituencies and to prevent a range of issues (including campaign-finance reform) from being acted on. Seeing themselves as the “fix-it” generation, Xers long for leaders who will talk straight and advocate the shared sacrifices necessary to correct the long-term problems that preoccupy them most. But today’s elected officials are far too deeply trapped in a politics of short-term convenience to deliver anything of the sort. Not surprisingly, then, Xers are eager to do away with the two-party system. They register particularly strong support for third parties, for campaign-finance reform, and for various forms of direct democracy.

The final core belief that helps to define the political views of today’s young adults is their commitment to environmental conservation. Thanks to the advent of environmental education and the spread of environmental activism, Xers grew up experiencing recycling as second nature; many actually went home and lobbied their parents to get with the program. In fact, the environment is one of the rare public-policy arenas in which Xers are fairly aware. Many have incorporated their environmental values into their lifestyles and career choices. For instance, a 1997 *Harvard Business Review* article titled “Tomorrow’s Leaders: The World According to Generation X” revealed that most current MBA students believed that corporations have a clear-cut responsibility to be environment-friendly in their practices. This generation does not believe that a tradeoff is necessary between a strong economy and a healthy environment.

Fiscal prudence, economic populism, social investment, campaign reform, shared sacrifice, and environmental conservation—this constellation of beliefs transcends the existing left-right spectrum. It should be immediately apparent that this generation’s voice is not represented by any of the established leaders or factions in the political mainstream. And Xers seem to recognize as much—61 percent agree with the statement “Politicians and political leaders have failed my generation.” So how would American politics change if the voice of Generation X were suddenly heard?

A NEW POLITICAL AGENDA

DESPITE its feeble rates of political participation, Generation X has already—if unwittingly—exerted an influence on the substance of our politics. This may seem counterintuitive, but who would deny that young Americans were a major force in pushing the balanced-budget cause to the fore? In part this is owing to the large number of Xer votes cast in 1992 for Ross Perot, the candidate who staked much of his campaign on balancing the federal books. Though Perot lost, his pet issue gained momentum as candidates from both parties scrambled to win over Reform Party voters, and the young ones in particular. Recognizing that Generation X makes up a large and particularly unpredictable voting bloc, candidates from across

the spectrum have gone out of their way to woo the youth vote, usually by paying lip service to some of young people’s more obvious concerns, including, most recently, Social Security reform. Over time, however, Xer support for issues such as balancing the budget and saving Social Security will turn out to be only part of a much broader agenda, one that could come to challenge the status quo on everything from taxes to social policy to political reform.

For years the nation’s tax debate has revolved around the question of how much to tax, with the left arguing for more and the right for less. In keeping with the concept of balanced-budget populism, the Xer economic agenda would start with the assumption that the government’s share of national income should remain roughly constant. It would focus instead on a far more profound set of questions: What should be taxed? Who should be taxed? What should we invest in? and Who should get the benefits? Over the past several decades the tax burden has crept further and further down the income and age ladder, with the benefits going increasingly to the elderly and the well-to-do—the government now spends nine times as much on each elderly person as it does on each child. If Xers had their way, the collection of taxes would become more progressive and the distribution of benefits more widespread.

One would never know it from partisan skirmishes over income-tax cuts, but the payroll tax actually constitutes the largest tax burden borne by 70 percent of working families and by a full 90 percent of working Americans under age thirty. It is also the most regressive of all taxes, because it kicks in from the first dollar earned, falls exclusively on wages, and is capped at \$72,600. An appealing solution to this problem would be to replace payroll taxes with pollution taxes, thereby boosting wages, promoting jobs, and cleaning up the environment, all without raising the deficit. Taxing waste instead of work is precisely the kind of innovative and pragmatic proposal that could help to galvanize the members of Generation X, who have been put to sleep by the current tax debate.

Sooner or later Xers will figure out that America could raise trillions of dollars in new public revenues by charging fair market value for the use of common assets—the oil and coal in the ground, the trees in our national forests, the airwaves and the electromagnetic spectrum—and the rights to pollute our air. We currently subsidize the use of these resources in a number of ways, creating a huge windfall for a small number of industries and a significant loss for all other Americans. The idea of reversing this trend by charging fair market value for the use of common assets and returning the proceeds directly to each American citizen plays to a number of Xer political views—it is populist, equitable, libertarian, and pro-environment all at once.

The populist economic leanings of young adults will also lead them to rethink various other elements of the social contract between citizens, government, and business. For one thing, ending corporate welfare would appeal to a gen-

eration weaned on the principle of self-sufficiency. The hidden welfare state, composed of corporate subsidies and tax loopholes that overwhelmingly benefit the well-to-do, has grown several times as large as the hotly debated social-welfare state that benefits the disadvantaged through means-tested programs. Yet today's politicians are too much indebted to the beneficiaries of this governmental largesse to do anything about it. Here, then, may be the key to keeping the budget balanced while funding the social investments that are so important to Xers: all of the money raised or saved by charging for the use of common assets, ending corporate welfare, and closing unproductive tax loopholes could be used to make a topnotch education affordable and accessible to all and, just as important, to make every American child a "trust-fund" baby from birth.

Making economic incentives more progressive and redirecting budgetary priorities is only one part of an Xer economic agenda. Today's young adults, more than any other group at a comparable age, are concerned about their economic outlook and their ability to balance the conflicting demands of work and family. If such problems worsen as a result of economic globalization, then the populism of Generation X, which up to this point has been relatively mild, may suddenly become more pronounced. For instance, the 2030 Center, an advocacy group concerned about the economic well-being of Generation X, is launching a campaign to promote a contingent workers' bill of rights, which calls on employers to provide health care and other benefits to more of their workers.

Even as they were being told that education is the key to a promising future, many Xers were learning the hard way how bad our urban schools have become, and how inequitable is the access to a high-quality education. Neither party is providing a palatable solution: Republicans are all but writing off public schools by emphasizing vouchers that favor private schools, and Democrats are perpetuating many of the worst public-school problems by refusing to challenge the teachers' unions. There are no simple solutions to the predicament, but an obvious starting point would be to sever the traditional link between public-school funding and local property taxes, which only exacerbates existing socioeconomic inequalities. (Several states have already begun moving in this direction.) Another significant improvement would be to increase the skill level of our public-school teachers by imposing stricter standards and offering more-competitive salaries.

Xers would support enacting new policies to advance racial integration and civil rights in America—policies that avoid the divisiveness and unintended consequences of race-based affirmative action. Although such policies made sense when they were introduced, many Xers believe, race is no longer the determining factor in who gets ahead. In the twenty-first

century poor black Americans will have more in common with poor white Americans than they will with upper-middle-class blacks. If the goal is to help those most in need, it would make a lot more sense to pursue class-based affirmative-action programs. Doing so would enable all those at the bottom—regardless of race—to get the help they need, in a way that promoted national unity and racial integration. Another promising alternative to race-based affirmative action is the Texas Ten Percent Plan, whereby all students graduating in the top tenth of their high school classes—whether in inner-city schools or in elite private ones—are automatically accepted into the state's public universities.

Fundamental campaign and political reform is the sine qua non of a Generation X political agenda. Like most Americans,

**Balanced-budget populism, social investment,
and other elements of the Xer agenda could
resonate with Americans of all ages—and help to
create the nation's next majoritarian coalition.**

Xers would like to see bold steps taken to get money out of politics. But persuading America's young that their individual votes matter is likely to require reforms far more radical than any currently under consideration.

Until recently most political-reform movements in the United States were based on the assumption that the problem was not the two-party system itself but rather its corruption by special interests and incumbency (hence the proposed cures of campaign-finance reform and term limits). But neither the reduction of private campaign contributions nor the implementation of term limits for elected officials will alter what seems to alienate Xers most of all: the political duopoly of Democrats and Republicans. The rules of today's two-party system actively discourage a third or a fourth party. Consequently, there is growing interest among the young in replacing our archaic electoral process (itself a remnant from eighteenth-century England) with a modern multiparty system. With three or four parties contesting many races, politics might become exciting enough to draw in disenchanted Xers who believe, correctly, that in most elections today their votes do not count.

As the vanguard of the digital age, Xers will also be inclined to support experiments with electronic democracy. For instance, one Xer has launched an effort to make information about the sources of campaign contributions immediately available to the public and the media over the Internet. But the full potential of digital democracy runs much deeper. Already groups are experimenting with electronic town-hall meetings and various forms of deliberative democracy, in which individuals are provided with a full range of information on a

particular issue and can register their opinions with the push of a button. It is not hard to imagine a day when citizens will be able to register and vote online, and to monitor the performance of their elected officials with electronic scorecards.

The introduction of electronic communication within corporate America has helped to flatten organizational hierarchies, boost information flows, increase decision-making speed, and, most of all, empower workers. It is at least conceivable that the introduction of electronic forms of democracy could serve to re-engage a generation that has been alienated by today's money-, spin-, and celebrity-dominated politics. And if Xers do eventually enter the fray, their agenda will transform America's political landscape.

THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN POLITICS

REPUBLICANS and Democrats will be tempted to dismiss the Xer agenda, because it threatens their electoral coalitions and the politics of short-term convenience. But both parties will do so at their peril, because many of the issues that Xers care most about are already rising to the political surface.

A glimpse of the future may come, strangely enough, in the election of Jesse Ventura as governor of Minnesota. Much of Ventura's support came from young adults, who took advantage of Minnesota's same-day registration law and stormed the polls, helping to create a record turnout. This suggests that if a political candidate can somehow capture the passion of young adults, they will do their part. Ventura offered young Minnesotans something refreshing: a clear alternative to Democrats and Republicans, and a willingness to take on the status quo. But Jesse Ventura is no figurehead for Xers; he is just an early beneficiary of their pent-up political frustration.

As the Xer political agenda starts to take hold, it will further strain existing loyalties. On the Republican side, the odd-bedfellow coalition of social conservatives and economic libertarians that has defined the party for the past two decades is coming apart as a result of the Clinton impeachment saga, whose most lasting legacy may be that it dealt a coup de grace to the political aspirations of the religious right. The Democratic coalition is just as fragile, particularly since it has been losing its base of working-class white men, and the potential retreat of the religious right may deprive Democrats of an obvious opponent against which to rally. As these de-alignments unfold, major shifts in the makeup and core agendas of both parties become almost inevitable.

The stability of today's political consensus is also contingent on the promise of an economy that continues to expand. Take that away, and the props of the status quo—a balanced budget and the novelty of a budgetary surplus, a booming stock market and stable price structures, low unemployment and rising wages, falling welfare rolls and crime rates, and the

illusion of a painless fix to Social Security—all topple at once. No business cycle lasts forever, and the global economic crisis of 1998 should come as a warning of what may lie ahead. The prospect of a significant recession leaves the future of American politics wide open.

Turning points in our nation's political history, occasioned by the collapse of an existing civic and political consensus, have usually been accompanied by rampant individualism, weakened institutions, and heightened levels of political alienation. On these scores Xers are playing out their historic role remarkably well. But such periods of civic unrest have also stimulated new political agendas, which eventually force one or both parties to remake themselves around new priorities and coalitions. Could the Generation X political agenda serve as the basis of America's next political consensus?

Balanced-budget populism, social investment, no-nonsense pragmatism, and shared sacrifice could resonate quite strongly with Americans of all ages—particularly the increasing number who are fed up with conventional politics. What is more, the Xer synthesis of a middle-class economic agenda with a moderate social one could remake the powerful alliance between progressives and populists that dominated national politics (and brought widespread upward mobility) from the 1930s to 1960s, when it was ripped apart by the cultural upheaval of the Baby Boom. In practical terms this new politics—based on fiscal prudence, economic populism, family-friendly morality, social investment, campaign reform, environmental conservation, and technological innovation—could eventually take hold in either of the major parties, both of which are now searching for a coherent agenda and a lasting voter base. For Democrats it could mark a return to the party's New Deal roots, and for Republicans it could give substance to heretofore vague calls for a "compassionate conservatism."

Since this new politics could speak to many of those who are alienated by the current political order, Xers and older Americans alike, it could give birth to our nation's next majoritarian coalition. Such a coalition could do a great deal to reinvigorate our nation's democracy, benefit the majority of its citizens, and restore legitimacy to our political system.

When history books are written at the end of the twenty-first century, it is unlikely that the post-Baby Boom generation will still be referred to as a nondescript "X." One way or another, this generation will be judged and labeled by its legacy. Today's young adults will be remembered either as a late-blooming generation that ultimately helped to revive American democracy by coalescing around a bold new political program and bringing the rest of the nation along with them, or as another silent generation that stood by as our democracy and society suffered a slow decline.

The great question of twenty-first-century politics is whether a critical mass of Xers will eventually recognize the broader potential of their agenda, and outgrow their aversion to politics. ☪

**by Michael Gerber and
Jonathan Schwarz**

	Sentient Metals		Dingy Gases
	Al Kaline Metals		Solid Gases
	Fey Metals		Criminal Elements
	©Microsoft Corporation		Consult Your Physician

THIN ICE

“STEREOTYPE THREAT” AND BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS

by CLAUDE M. STEELE

When capable black college students fail to perform as well as their white counterparts, the explanation often has less to do with preparation or ability than with the threat of stereotypes about their capacity to succeed. Educators at Stanford who tested this hypothesis report their findings and propose solutions

THE buildings had hardly changed in the thirty years since I'd been there. "There" was a small liberal-arts school quite near the college that I attended. In my student days I had visited it many times to see friends. This time I was there to give a speech about how racial and gender stereotypes, floating and abstract though they might seem, can affect concrete things like grades, test scores, and academic identity. My talk was received warmly, and the next morning I met with a small group of African-American students. I have done this on many campuses. But this time, perhaps cued by the familiarity of the place, I had an experience of *déjà vu*. The students expressed a litany of complaints that could have come straight from the mouths of the black friends I had visited there thirty years earlier: the curriculum was too white, they heard too little black music, they were ignored in class, and too often they felt slighted by faculty members and other students. Despite the school's recruitment efforts, they were a small minority. The core of their social life was their own group. To relieve the dysphoria, they went home a lot on weekends.

I found myself giving them the same advice my father gave me when I was in college: lighten up on the politics, get the best education you can, and move on. But then I surprised myself by saying, "To do this you have to learn from people who part of yourself tells you are difficult to trust."

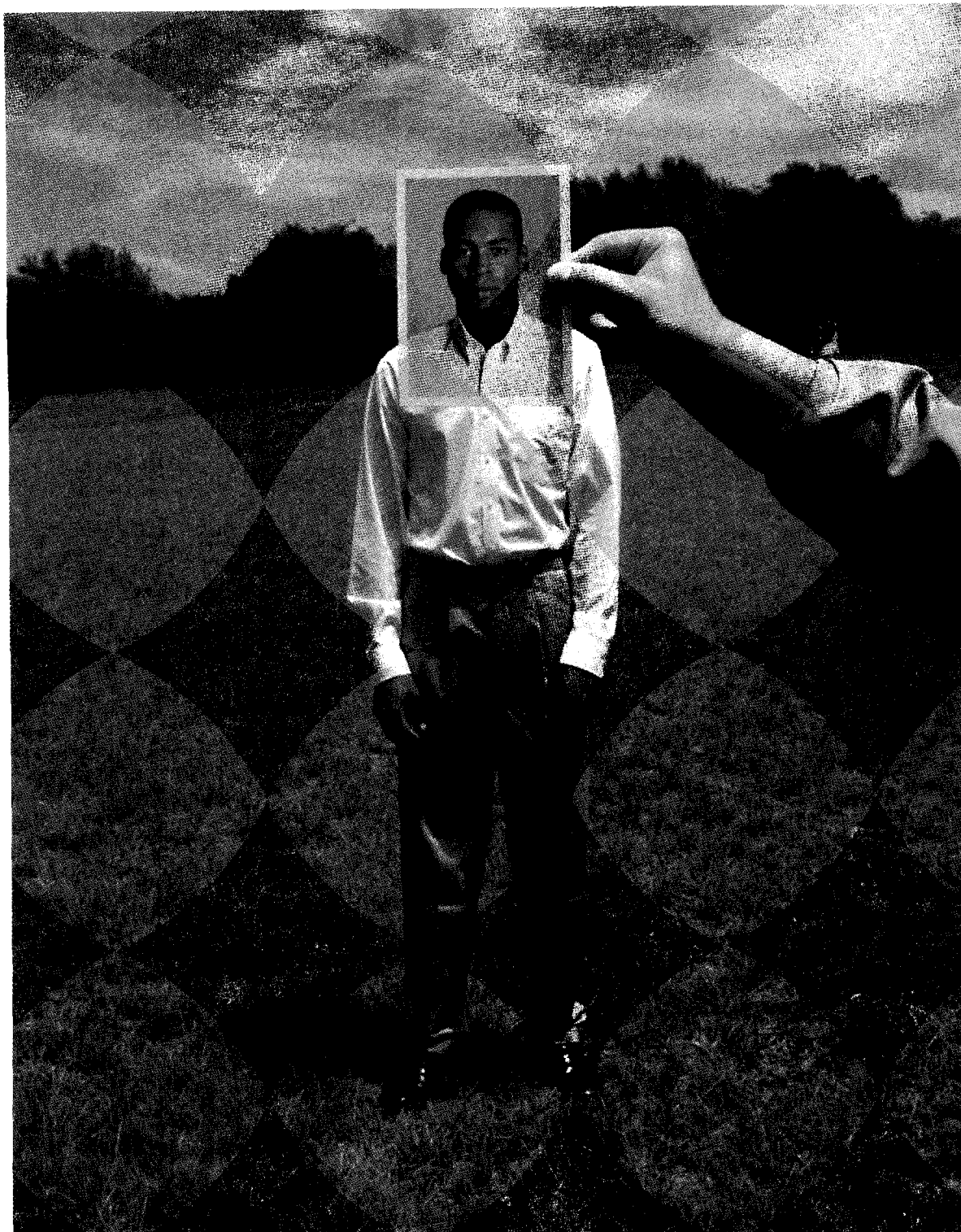
Over the past four decades African-American college students have been more in the spotlight than any other American students. This is because they aren't just college students;

they are a cutting edge in America's effort to integrate itself in the thirty-five years since the passage of the Civil Rights Act. These students have borne much of the burden for our national experiment in racial integration. And to a significant degree the success of the experiment will be determined by their success.

Nonetheless, throughout the 1990s the national college-dropout rate for African-Americans has been 20 to 25 percent higher than that for whites. Among those who finish college, the grade-point average of black students is two thirds of a grade below that of whites.

A recent study by William Bowen and Derek Bok, reported in their book *The Shape of the River*, brings some happy news: despite this underachievement in college, black students who attend the most selective schools in the country go on to do just as well in postgraduate programs and professional attainment as other students from those schools. This is a telling fact in support of affirmative action, since only these schools use affirmative action in admissions. Still, the underperformance of black undergraduates is an unsettling problem, one that may alter or hamper career development, especially among blacks not attending the most selective schools.

Attempts to explain the problem can sound like a debate about whether America is a good society, at least by the standard of racial fairness, and maybe even about whether racial integration is possible. It is an uncomfortably finger-pointing debate. Does the problem stem from something about black students themselves, such as poor motivation, a distracting



peer culture, lack of family values, or—the unsettling suggestion of *The Bell Curve*—genes? Or does it stem from the conditions of blacks' lives: social and economic deprivation, a society that views blacks through the lens of diminishing stereotypes and low expectations, too much coddling, or too much neglect?

In recent years this debate has acquired a finer focus: the

fate of middle-class black students. Americans have come to view the disadvantages associated with being black as disadvantages primarily of social and economic resources and opportunity. This assumption is often taken to imply that if you are black and come from a socioeconomically middle-class home, you no longer suffer a significant disadvantage of race. “Why should the son of a black physician be given an ad-

vantage in college admission over the son of a white delivery-truck driver?" This is a standard question in the controversy over affirmative action. And the assumption behind it is that surely in today's society the disadvantages of race are overcome when lower socioeconomic status is overcome.

But virtually all aspects of underperformance—lower standardized-test scores, lower college grades, lower graduation

odists to women and the elderly. And in a situation where one of those stereotypes applies—a man talking to women about pay equity, for example, or an aging faculty member trying to remember a number sequence in the middle of a lecture—we know that we may be judged by it.

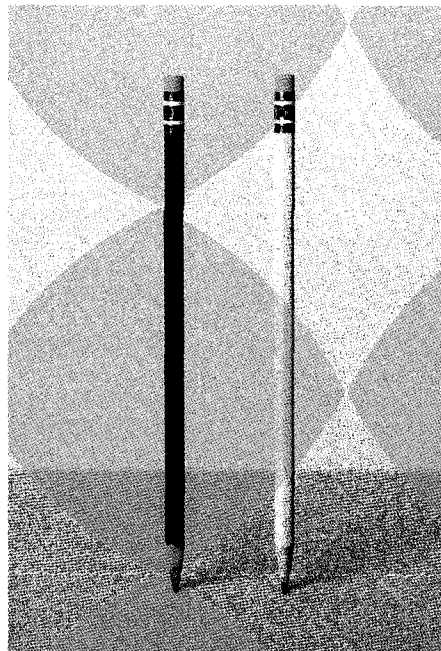
Like the young man in the story, we can feel mistrustful and apprehensive in such situations. For him, as for African-

The finger-pointing debate over the underperformance of black undergraduates has missed one big culprit—"stereotype threat." This is the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype.

rates—persist among students from the African-American middle class. This situation forces on us an uncomfortable recognition: that beyond class, something racial is depressing the academic performance of these students.

Some time ago I and two colleagues, Joshua Aronson and Steven Spencer, tried to see the world from the standpoint of these students, concerning ourselves less with features of theirs that might explain their troubles than with features of the world they see. A story I was told recently depicts some of these. The storyteller was worried about his friend, a normally energetic black student who had broken up with his longtime girlfriend and had since learned that she, a Hispanic, was now dating a white student. This hit him hard. Not long after hearing about his girlfriend, he sat through an hour's discussion of *The Bell Curve* in his psychology class, during which the possible genetic inferiority of his race was openly considered. Then he overheard students at lunch arguing that affirmative action allowed in too many underqualified blacks. By his own account, this young man had experienced very little of what he thought of as racial discrimination on campus. Still, these were features of his world. Could they have a bearing on his academic life?

My colleagues and I have called such features "stereotype threat"—the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype. Everyone experiences stereotype threat. We are all members of some group about which negative stereotypes exist, from white males and Meth-



American students generally, negative stereotypes apply in many situations, even personal ones. Why was that old roommate unfriendly to him? Did that young white woman who has been so nice to him in class not return his phone call because she's afraid he'll ask her for a date? Is it because of his race or something else about him? He cannot know the answers, but neither can his rational self fully dismiss the questions. Together they raise a deeper question: Will his race be a boundary to his experience, to his emotions, to his relationships?

With time he may weary of the extra vigilance these situations require and of what the psychologists Jennifer Crocker and Brenda Major have called the "attributional ambiguity" of being on the receiving end of negative stereotypes. To reduce this stress he may learn to care less about the situations and activities that bring it about—to realign his self-regard so that it no longer depends on how he does in the situation. We have called this psychic adjustment "disidentification." Pain is lessened by ceasing to identify with the part of life in which the pain occurs. This withdrawal of psychic investment may be supported by other members of the stereotype-threatened group—even to the point of its becoming a group norm. But not caring can mean not being motivated. And this can have real costs. When stereotype threat affects school life, disidentification is a high price to pay for psychic comfort. Still, it is a price that groups contending with powerful negative stereotypes about their abilities—women in advanced math, African-Americans in all academic areas—may too often pay.

MEASURING STEREOTYPE THREAT

CAN stereotype threat be shown to affect academic performance? And if so, who would be most affected—stronger or weaker students? Which has a greater influence on academic success among black college students—the degree of threat or the level of preparation with which they enter college? Can the college experience be redesigned to lessen the threat? And if so, would that redesign help these students to succeed academically?

As we confronted these questions in the course of our research, we came in for some surprises. We began with what we took to be the hardest question: Could something as abstract as stereotype threat really affect something as irrepressible as intelligence? Ours is an individualistic culture; forward movement is seen to come from within. Against this cultural faith one needs evidence to argue that something as “sociological” as stereotype threat can repress something as “individualistic” as intelligence.

To acquire such evidence, Joshua Aronson and I (following a procedure developed with Steven Spencer) designed an experiment to test whether the stereotype threat that black students might experience when taking a difficult standardized test could depress their performance on the test to a statistically reliable degree. In this experiment we asked black and white Stanford students into our laboratory and gave them, one at a time, a thirty-minute verbal test made up of items from the advanced Graduate Record Examination in literature. Most of these students were sophomores, which meant that the test was particularly hard for them—precisely the feature, we reasoned, that would make this simple testing situation different for our black participants than for our white participants.

In matters of race we often assume that when a situation is objectively the same for different groups, it is *experienced* in the same way by each group. This assumption might seem especially reasonable in the case of “standardized” cognitive tests. But for black students, difficulty with the test makes the negative stereotype relevant as an interpretation of their performance, and of them. They know that they are especially likely to be seen as having limited ability. Groups not stereotyped in this way don’t experience this extra intimidation. And it is a serious intimidation, implying as it does that they may not belong in walks of life where the tested abilities are important—walks of life in which they are heavily invested. Like many pressures, it may not be experienced in a fully conscious way, but it may impair their best thinking.

This is exactly what Aronson and I found. When the difficult verbal test was presented as a test of ability, black students performed dramatically less well than white students, even though we had statistically matched the two groups in ability level. Something other than ability was involved; we believed it was stereotype threat.

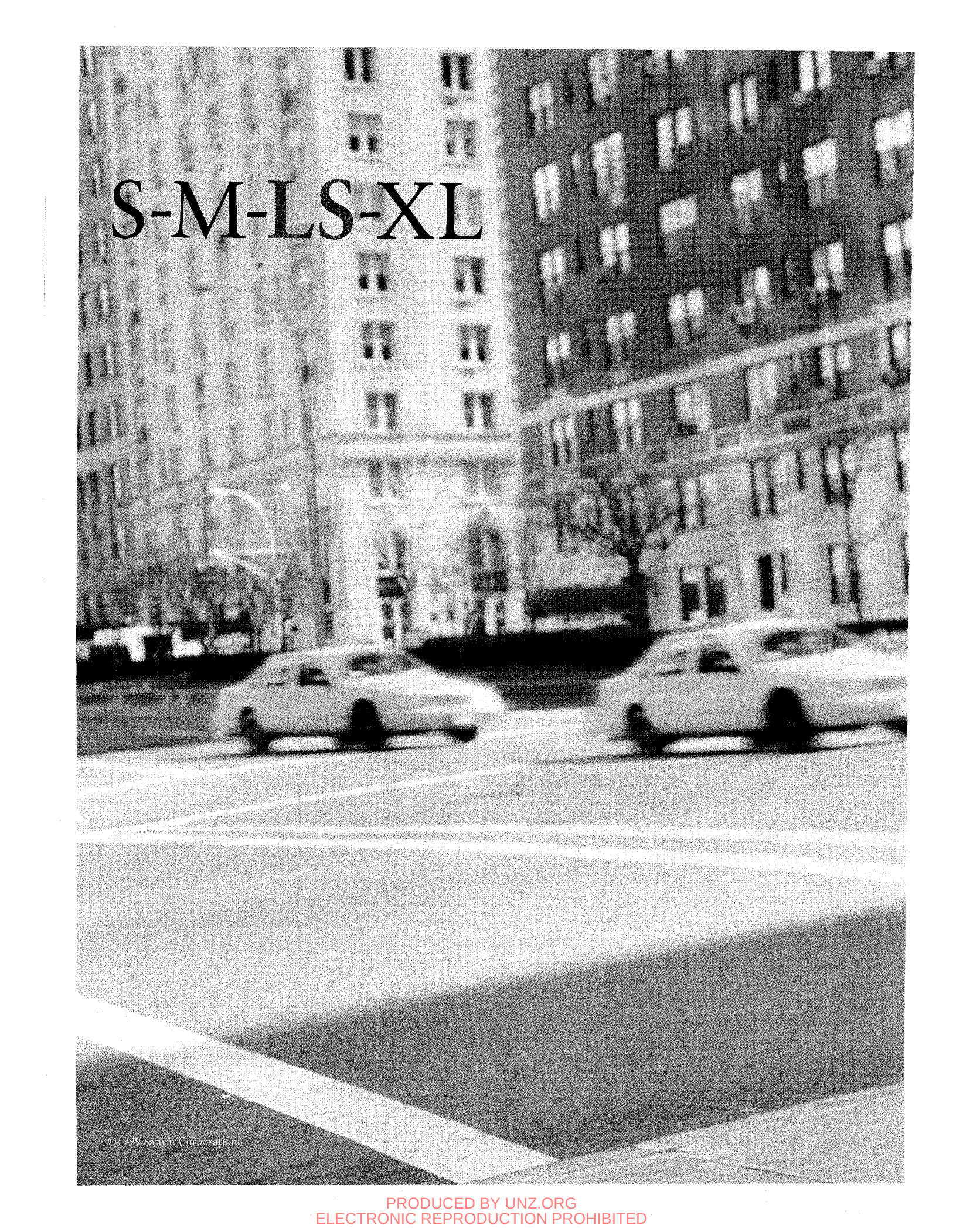
But maybe the black students performed less well than the

white students because they were less motivated, or because their skills were somehow less applicable to the advanced material of this test. We needed some way to determine if it was indeed stereotype threat that depressed the black students’ scores. We reasoned that if stereotype threat had impaired their performance on the test, then reducing this threat would allow their performance to improve. We presented the same test as a laboratory task that was used to study how certain problems are generally solved. We stressed that the task did not measure a person’s level of intellectual ability. A simple instruction, yes, but it profoundly changed the meaning of the situation. In one stroke “spotlight anxiety,” as the psychologist William Cross once called it, was turned off—and the black students’ performance on the test rose to match that of equally qualified whites.

Aronson and I decided that what we needed next was direct evidence of the subjective state we call stereotype threat. To seek this, we looked into whether simply sitting down to take a difficult test of ability was enough to make black students mindful of their race and stereotypes about it. This may seem unlikely. White students I have taught over the years have sometimes said that they have hardly any sense of even having a race. But blacks have many experiences with the majority “other group” that make their race salient to them.

We again brought black and white students in to take a difficult verbal test. But just before the test began, we gave them a long list of words, each of which had two letters missing. They were told to complete the words on this list as fast as they could. We knew from a preliminary survey that twelve of the eighty words we had selected could be completed in such a way as to relate to the stereotype about blacks’ intellectual ability. The fragment “--ce,” for example, could become “race.” If simply taking a difficult test of ability was enough to make black students mindful of stereotypes about their race, these students should complete more fragments with stereotype-related words. That is just what happened. When black students were told that the test would measure ability, they completed the fragments with significantly more stereotype-related words than when they were told that it was not a measure of ability. Whites made few stereotype-related completions in either case.

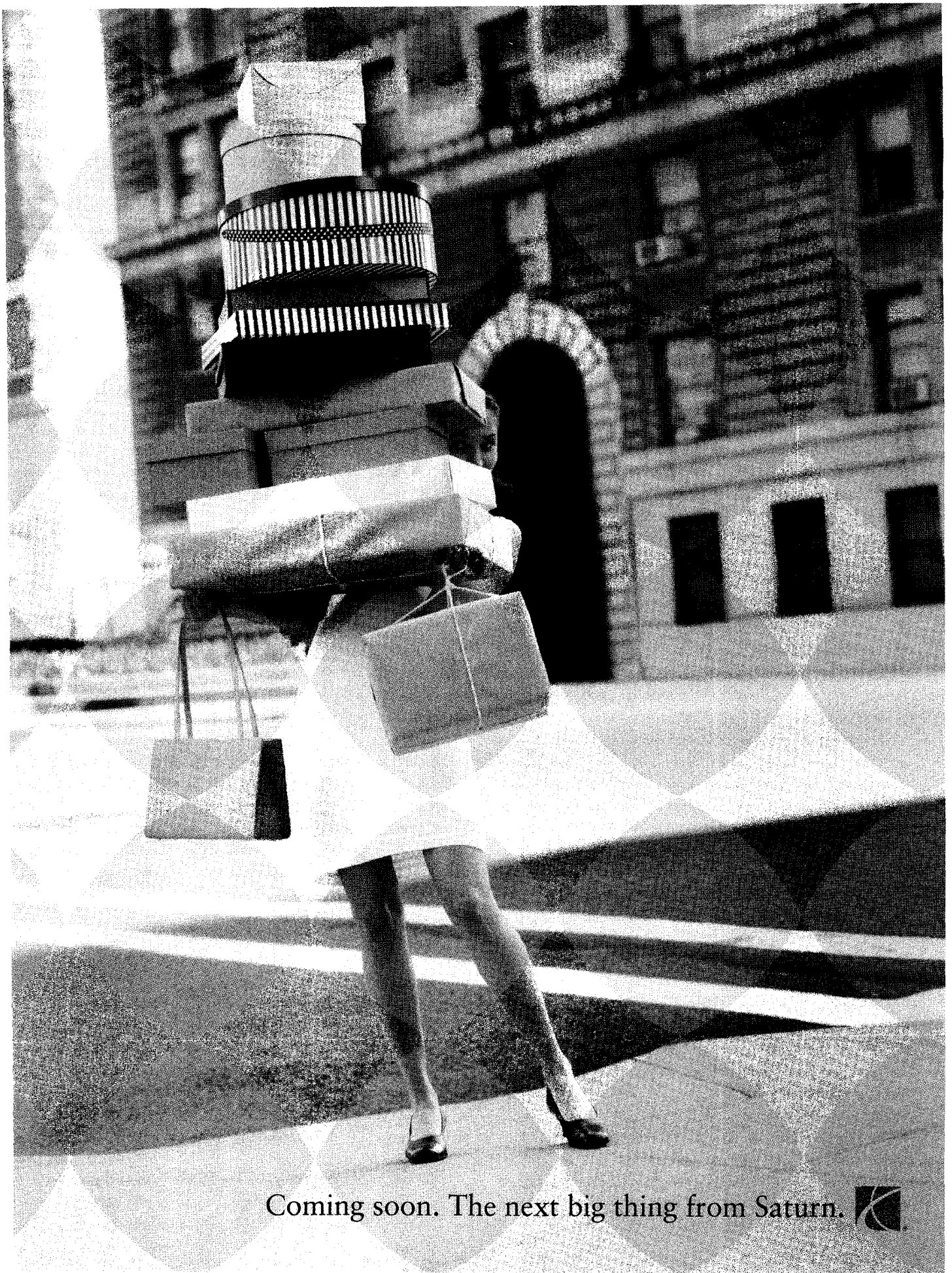
What kind of worry is signaled by this race consciousness? To find out, we used another probe. We asked participants on the brink of the difficult test to tell us their preferences in sports and music. Some of these, such as basketball, jazz, and hip-hop, are associated with African-American imagery, whereas others, such as tennis, swimming, and classical music, are not. Something striking emerged: when black students expected to take a test of ability, they spurned things African-American, reporting less interest in, for instance, basketball, jazz, and hip-hop than whites did. When the test was presented as unrelated to ability, black students strongly preferred things African-American. They eschewed these things only when preferring them would encourage a stereotypic view of themselves. It was the spotlight that they were trying to avoid.

A black and white photograph of a city street. In the foreground, a wide road with white lane markings leads towards the background. Two cars are visible in the middle ground, one on the left and one on the right, both appearing to be in motion. The background is filled with tall, multi-story buildings with many windows. The overall scene is a typical urban environment.

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STEREOTYPE THREAT VERSUS SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

ANOTHER question arises: Do the effects of stereotype threat come entirely from the fear of being stereotyped, or do they come from something internal to black students—self-doubt, for example?

Beginning with George Herbert Mead's idea of the "looking-glass self," social psychology has assumed that one's self-image derives in large part from how one is viewed by others—family, school, and the broader society. When those views are negative, people may internalize them, resulting in lower self-esteem—or self-hatred, as it has been called. This theory was first applied to the experience of Jews, by Sigmund Freud and Bruno Bettelheim, but it was also soon applied to the experience of African-Americans, by Gordon Allport, Frantz Fanon, Kenneth Clark, and others. According to the theory, black students internalize negative stereotypes as performance anxiety and low expectations for achievement, which they then fulfill. The "self-fulfilling prophecy" has become a commonplace about these students. Stereotype threat, however, is something different, something external: the situational threat of being negatively stereotyped. Which of these two processes, then, caused the results of our experiments?

Joshua Aronson, Michael Lustina, Kelli Keough, Joseph Brown, Catherine Good, and I devised a way to find out. Suppose we told white male students who were strong in math that a difficult math test they were about to take was one on which Asians generally did better than whites. White males should not have a sense of group inferiority about math, since no societal stereotype alleges such an inferiority. Yet this comment would put them under a form of stereotype threat: any faltering on the test could cause them to be seen negatively from the standpoint of the positive stereotype about Asians and math ability. If stereotype threat alone—in the absence of any internalized self-doubt—was capable of disrupting test performance, then white males taking the test after this comment should perform less well than white males taking the test without hearing the comment. That is just what happened. Stereotype threat impaired intellectual functioning in a group unlikely to have any sense of group inferiority.

In science, as in the rest of life, few things are definitive. But these results are pretty good evidence that stereotype threat's impairment of standardized-test performance does not depend on cueing a pre-existing anxiety. Steven Spencer, Diane Quinn, and I have shown how stereotype threat depresses the performance of accomplished female math students on a difficult math test, and how that performance improves dramatically when the threat is lifted. Jean-Claude Croizet, working in France with a stereotype that links poor verbal skills with lower-class status, found analogous results: lower-class college students performed less well than upper-class college students under the threat of a stereotype-based judgment, but performed as well when the threat was removed.

Is everyone equally threatened and disrupted by a stereotype? One might expect, for example, that it would affect the weakest students most. But in all our research the most achievement-oriented students, who were also the most skilled, motivated, and confident, were the most impaired by stereotype threat. This fact had been under our noses all along—in our data and even in our theory. A person has to care about a domain in order to be disturbed by the prospect of being stereotyped in it. That is the whole idea of disidentification—protecting against stereotype threat by ceasing to care about the domain in which the stereotype applies. Our earlier experiments had selected black students who identified with verbal skills and women who identified with math. But when we tested participants who identified less with these domains, what had been under our noses hit us in the face. None of them showed any effect of stereotype threat whatsoever.

These weakly identified students did not perform well on the test: once they discovered its difficulty, they stopped trying very hard and got a low score. But their performance did not differ depending on whether they felt they were at risk of being judged stereotypically.

WHY STRONG STUDENTS ARE STEREOTYPE-THREATENED

THIS finding, I believe, tells us two important things. The first is that the poorer college performance of black students may have another source in addition to the one—lack of good preparation and, perhaps, of identification with school achievement—that is commonly understood. This additional source—the threat of being negatively stereotyped in the environment—has not been well understood. The distinction has important policy implications: different kinds of students may require different pedagogies of improvement.

The second thing is poignant: what exposes students to the pressure of stereotype threat is not weaker academic identity and skills but stronger academic identity and skills. They may have long seen themselves as good students—better than most. But led into the domain by their strengths, they pay an extra tax on their investment—vigilant worry that their future will be compromised by society's perception and treatment of their group.

This tax has a long tradition in the black community. The Jackie Robinson story is a central narrative of black life, literature, and journalism. *Ebony* magazine has run a page for fifty years featuring people who have broken down one or another racial barrier. Surely the academic vanguard among black college students today knows this tradition—and knows, therefore, that the thing to do, as my father told me, is to buckle down, pay whatever tax is required, and disprove the damn stereotype.

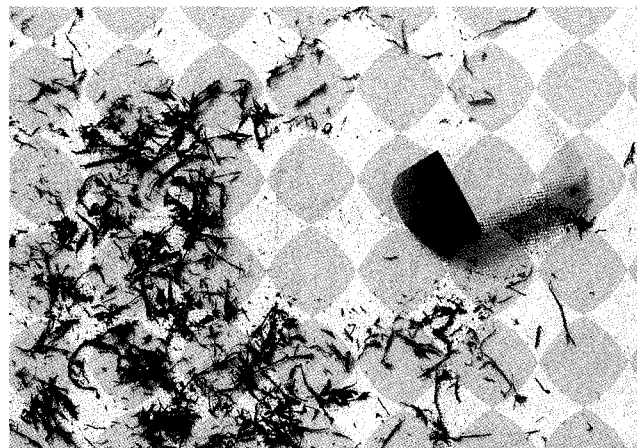
That, however, seems to be precisely what these students are trying to do. In some of our experiments we administered the test of ability by computer, so that we could see how long par-

ticipants spent looking at different parts of the test questions. Black students taking the test under stereotype threat seemed to be trying too hard rather than not hard enough. They reread the questions, reread the multiple choices, rechecked their answers, more than when they were not under stereotype threat. The threat made them inefficient on a test that, like most standardized tests, is set up so that thinking long often means thinking wrong, especially on difficult items like the ones we used.

Philip Uri Treisman, an innovator in math workshops for minority students who is based at the University of Texas, saw something similar in his black calculus students at the University of California at Berkeley: they worked long hours alone but they worked inefficiently—for example, checking and rechecking their calculations against the correct answers at the back of the book, rather than focusing on the concepts involved. Of course, trying extra hard helps with some school tasks. But under stereotype threat this effort may be misdirected. Achievement at the frontier of one's skills may be furthered more by a relaxed, open concentration than by a strong desire to disprove a stereotype by not making mistakes.

Sadly, the effort that accompanies stereotype threat exacts an additional price. Led by James Blascovich, of the University of California at Santa Barbara, we found that the blood pressure of black students performing a difficult cognitive task under stereotype threat was elevated compared with that of black students not under stereotype threat or white students in either situation.

In the old song about the “steel-drivin’ man,” John Henry races the new steam-driven drill to see who can dig a hole faster.



Certainly this is the right attitude. But taken to extremes, it can backfire. A deterioration of performance under stereotype threat by the skilled, confident black students in our experiments may be rooted in John Henryism.

This last point can be disheartening. Our research, however, offers an interesting suggestion about what can be done to overcome stereotype threat and its detrimental effects. The success of black students may depend less on expectations and motivation—things that are thought to drive academic performance—than on trust that stereotypes about their group will not have a limiting effect in their school world.

HOW TO REDUCE STEREOTYPE THREAT

PUTTING this idea to the test, Joseph Brown and I asked, How can the usual detrimental effect of stereotype threat on the standardized-test performance of these students be reduced? By strengthening students' expectations and confidence, or by strengthening their trust that they are not at risk of being judged on the basis of stereotypes? In the ensuing experiment we strengthened or weakened

participants' confidence in their verbal skills, by arranging for them to have either an impressive success or an impressive failure on a test of verbal skills, just before they took the same difficult verbal test we had used in our earlier research. When the second test was presented as a test of ability, the boosting or weakening of confidence in their verbal skills had no effect on

Our research bears a practical message: although stereotypes held by the larger society may be hard to change, it is possible to create educational niches in which negative stereotypes are not felt to apply—and which permit a sense of trust that would otherwise be difficult to sustain.

When the race is over, John Henry has prevailed by digging the deeper hole—only to drop dead. The social psychologist Sherman James uses the term “John Henryism” to describe a psychological syndrome that he found to be associated with hypertension in several samples of North Carolina blacks: holding too rigidly to the faith that discrimination and disadvantage can be overcome with hard work and persistence.

performance: black participants performed less well than equally skilled white participants. What does this say about the commonsense idea that black students' academic problems are rooted in lack of self-confidence?

What did raise the level of black students' performance to that of equally qualified whites was reducing stereotype threat—in this case by explicitly presenting the test as racial-

ly fair. When this was done, blacks performed at the same high level as whites even if their self-confidence had been weakened by a prior failure.

These results suggest something that I think has not been made clear elsewhere: when strong black students sit down to take a difficult standardized test, the extra apprehension they feel in comparison with whites is less about their own ability than it is about having to perform on a test and in a situation that may be primed to treat them stereotypically. We discovered the extent of this apprehension when we tried to develop procedures that would make our black participants see the test as “race-fair.” It wasn’t easy. African-Americans have endured so much bad press about test scores for so long that, in our experience, they are instinctively wary about the tests’ fairness. We were able to convince them that our test was race-fair only when we implied that the research generating the test had been done by blacks. When they felt trust, they performed well regardless of whether we had weakened their self-confidence beforehand. And when they didn’t feel trust, no amount of bolstering of self-confidence helped.

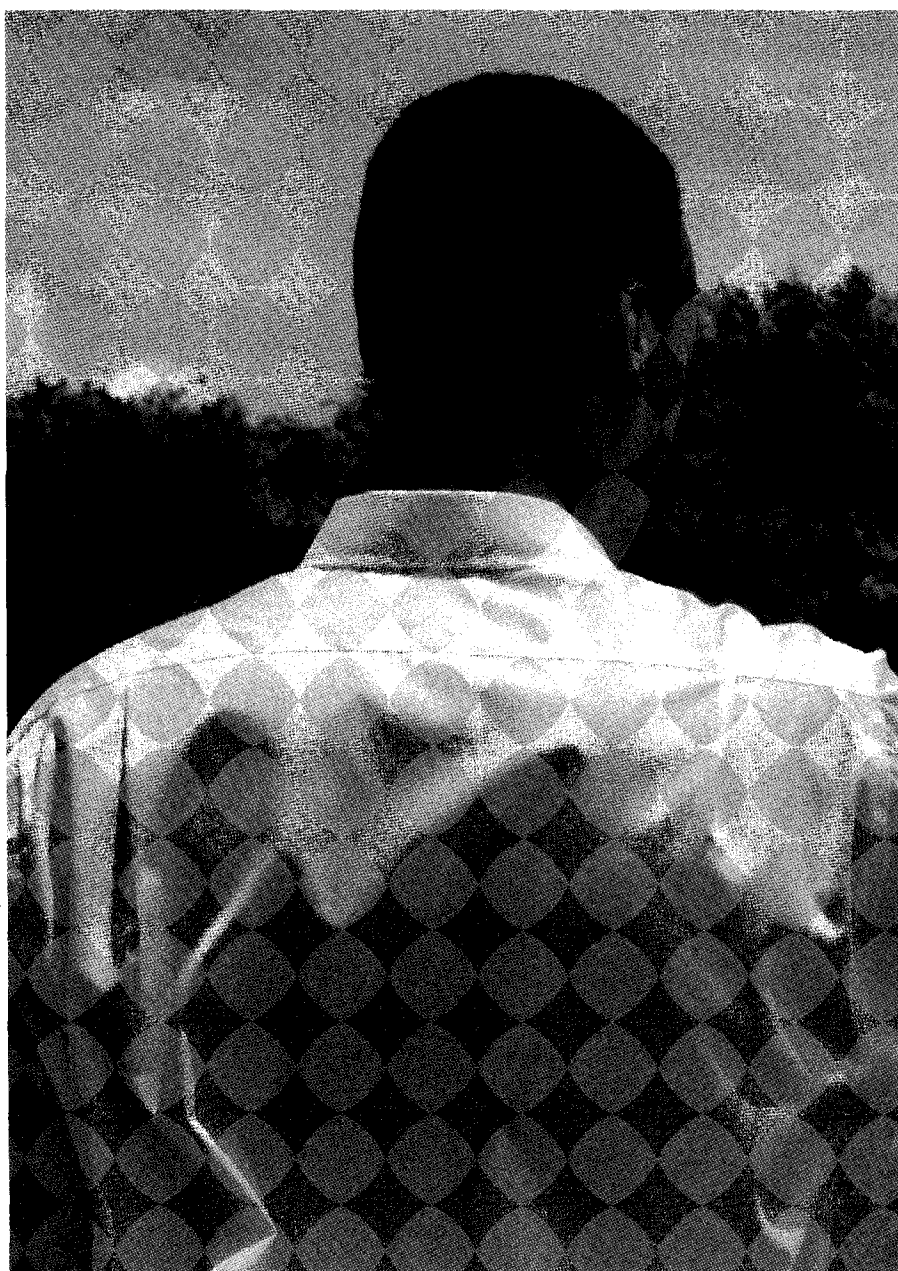
Policies for helping black students rest in significant part on assumptions about their psychology. As noted, they are typically assumed to lack confidence, which spawns a policy of confidence-building. This may be useful for students at the academic rearguard of the group. But the psychology of the academic vanguard appears different—underperformance appears to be rooted less in self-doubt than in social mistrust.

Education policy relevant to non-Asian minorities might fruitfully shift its focus toward fostering racial trust in the schooling situation—at least among students who come to school with good skills and high expectations. But how should this be done? Without particulars this conclusion can fade into banality, suggesting, as Alan Ryan has wryly put it in *Liberal Anxieties and Liberal Education*, that these students “will hardly be able to work at all unless everyone else exercises the utmost sensitivity to [their] anxieties.” Sensitivity is

nice, but it is an awful lot to expect, and even then, would it instill trust?

That is exactly what Geoffrey Cohen, Lee Ross, and I wondered as we took up the question of how a teacher or a mentor could give critical feedback across the “racial divide” and have that feedback be trusted. We reasoned that an answer to this question might yield insights about how to instill trust more broadly in the schooling environment. Cohen’s hunch was that niceness alone wouldn’t be enough. But the first question had to be whether there was in fact a racial divide between teachers and students, especially in the elite college environment in which we worked.

We set up a simple experiment. Cohen asked black and white Stanford students one at a time to write essays about



their favorite teachers, for possible publication in a journal on teaching. They were asked to return several days later for feedback on their essays. Before each student left the first writing session, Cohen put a Polaroid snapshot of the student on top of his or her essay. His ostensible purpose was to publish the picture if the essay was published. His real purpose was to let the essay writers know that the evaluator of their writing would be aware of their race. When they returned days later, they were given constructive but critical feedback. We looked at whether different ways of giving this feedback engendered different degrees of trust in it.

We found that neither straight feedback nor feedback preceded by the “niceness” of a cushioning statement (“There were many good things about your essay”) was trusted by

black students. They saw these criticisms as probably biased, and they were less motivated than white students to improve their essays. White students took the criticism at face value—even as an indication of interest in them. Black students, however, faced a different meaning: the “ambiguating” possibility that the criticism was motivated by negative stereotypes about their group as much as by the work itself. Herein lies the power of race to make one’s world insecure—quite apart from whatever actual discrimination one may experience.

But this experiment also revealed a way to be critical across the racial divide: tell the students that you are using high standards (this signals that the criticism reflects standards rather than race), and that your reading of their essays leads you to believe that they can meet those standards (this signals that you do not view them stereotypically). This shouldn’t be faked. High standards, at least in a relative sense, should be an inherent part of teaching, and critical feedback should be given in the belief that the recipient can reach those standards. These things go without saying for many students. But they have to be made explicit for students under stereotype threat. The good news of this study is that when they *are* made explicit, the students trust and respond to criticism. Black students who got this kind of feedback saw it as unbiased and were motivated to take their essays home and work on them even though this was not a class for credit. They were more motivated than any other group of students in the study—as if this combination of high standards and assurance was like water on parched land, a much needed but seldom received balm.

REASSESSING THE TEST-SCORE GAP

THERE is, of course, another explanation for why black college students haven’t fared well on predominantly white campuses: they aren’t prepared for the competition. This has become an assumption of those who oppose affirmative action in college admissions. Racial preference, the argument goes, brings black students onto campuses where they simply aren’t prepared to compete.

The fact most often cited in support of the underpreparation explanation is the lower SAT scores of black students, which sometimes average 200 points below those of other students on the same campus. The test-score gap has become shorthand for black students’ achievement problems. But the gap must be assessed cautiously.

First, black students have better skills than the gap suggests. Most of the gap exists because the proportion of blacks with very high SAT scores is smaller than the corresponding proportions of whites and Asians. Thus when each group’s scores are averaged, the black average will be lower than the white and Asian averages. This would be true even if the same admissions cut-off score were used for each group—even if, for example, affirmative action were eliminated entirely. Why a smaller proportion of blacks have very high scores is, of course, a com-



plex question with multiple answers, involving, among other things, the effects of race on educational access and experience as well as the processes dwelt on in this article. The point, though, is that blacks' test-score deficits are taken as a sign of underpreparation, whereas in fact virtually all black students on a given campus have tested skills within the same range as the tested skills of other students on the campus.

In any case, the skills and preparation measured by these tests also turn out not to be good determinants of college success. As the makers of the SAT themselves tell us, although this test is among the best of its kind, it measures only about 18 percent of the skills that influence first-year grades, and even less of what influences subsequent grades, graduation rates, and professional success.

Indulge a basketball analogy that my colleagues Jay Rosner and Lee Ross and I have developed. Suppose that you were obliged to select a basketball team on the basis of how many of ten free throws a player makes. You'd regret having to select players on the basis of a single criterion. You'd know that free-throw shooting involves only a few of the skills that go into basketball—and, worse, you'd know that you'd never pick a Shaquille O'Neal.

You'd also wonder how to interpret a player's score. If he made ten out of ten or zero out of ten, you'd be fairly confident about making a judgment. But what about the kid who makes five, six, or seven? Middling scores like these could be influenced by many things other than underlying potential for free-throw shooting or basketball playing. How much practice was involved? Was the kid having a good or a bad day? Roughly the same is true, I suggest, for standardized-test scores. Are they inflated by middle-class advantages such as prep courses, private schools, and tours of European cathedrals? Are they deflated by race-linked experiences such as social segregation and being consistently assigned to the lower tracks in school?

In sum, black college students are not as underprepared in academic skills as their group score deficit is taken to suggest. The deficit can appear large, but it is not likely to be the sole cause of the troubles they have once they get on campus.

Showing the insufficiency of one cause, of course, does not prove the sufficiency of another. My colleagues and I believed that our laboratory experiments had brought to light an overlooked cause of poor college performance among non-Asian minorities: the threat to social trust brought about by the stereotypes of the larger society. But to know the real-life importance of this threat would require testing *in situ*, in the buzz of everyday life.

To this end Steven Spencer, Richard Nisbett, Kent Harber, Mary Hummel, and I undertook a program aimed at incoming first-year students at the University of Michigan. Like virtually all other institutions of higher learning, Michigan had evidence of black students' underachievement. Our mission was clear: to see if we could improve their achievement by focusing on their transition into college life.

We also wanted to see how little we could get away with—that is, to develop a program that would succeed broadly without special efforts. The program (which started in 1991 and is ongoing) created a racially integrated “living and learning” community in a 250-student wing of a large dormitory. It focused students on academic work (through weekly “challenge” workshops), provided an outlet for discussing the personal side of college life (through weekly rap sessions), and affirmed the students' abilities (through, for example, reminding them that their admission was a vote of confidence). The program lasted just one semester, although most students remained in the dormitory wing for the rest of their first year.

Still, it worked: it gave black students a significant academic jump start. Those in the program (about 15 percent of the entering class) got better first-year grades than black students outside the program, even after controlling for differences between these groups in the skills with which they entered college. Equally important, the program greatly reduced underperformance: black students in the program got first-year grades almost as high as those of white students in the general Michigan population who entered with comparable test scores. This result signaled the achievement of an academic climate nearly as favorable to black students as to white students. And it was achieved through a concert of simple things that enabled black students to feel racially secure.

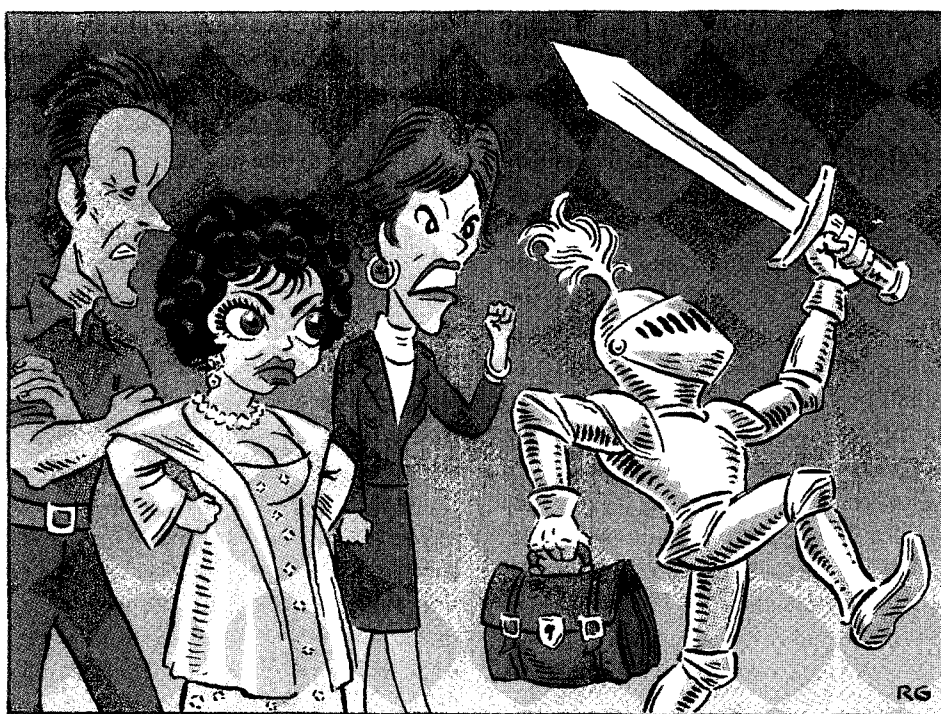
One tactic that worked surprisingly well was the weekly rap sessions—black and white students talking to one another in an informal dormitory setting, over pizza, about the personal side of their new lives in college. Participation in these sessions reduced students' feelings of stereotype threat and improved grades. Why? Perhaps when members of one racial group hear members of another racial group express the same concerns they have, the concerns seem less racial. Students may also learn that racial and gender stereotypes are either less at play than they might have feared or don't reflect the worst-feared prejudicial intent. Talking at a personal level across group lines can thus build trust in the larger campus community. The racial segregation besetting most college campuses can block this experience, allowing mistrust to build where cross-group communication would discourage it.

Our research bears a practical message: even though the stereotypes held by the larger society may be difficult to change, it is possible to create niches in which negative stereotypes are not felt to apply. In specific classrooms, within specific programs, even in the climate of entire schools, it is possible to weaken a group's sense of being threatened by negative stereotypes, to allow its members a trust that would otherwise be difficult to sustain. Thus when schools try to decide how important black-white test-score gaps are in determining the fate of black students on their campuses, they should keep something in mind: for the greatest portion of black students—those with strong academic identities—the degree of racial trust they feel in their campus life, rather than a few ticks on a standardized test, may be the key to their success. ☘

Tabloid Law

by ALEX BEAM

A report from the chaotic fringes of the First Amendment, where publicity collides with privacy and the check-out line leads to the courtroom



TABLOID LAWYER CORNERED IN CHURCH!

IFIRST learned about the tabloid wars during the after-service coffee hour at my church, in Auburndale, Massachusetts. An older couple were introducing their son, Jay Lavelly, to the congregation. Lavelly is a lawyer in Los Angeles. Like most of the L. A. lawyers I would later meet, he looks a decade younger than his age, which is fifty-five. Whether they are well preserved or re-engineered I have no idea.

As we chatted, Lavelly told me what kind of law he practices. He represents celebrity clients in lawsuits against the

supermarket tabloids. He and his partner, Martin Singer, have represented Arnold Schwarzenegger, Tom Selleck, Brad Pitt, and many other stars. We briefly discussed an article I had read in the tabloid *Globe*, which claimed that Schwarzenegger's heart-valve surgery had rendered him unfit for action-hero roles. I thought the article was silly, but Lavelly took it quite seriously. His partner had already filed a \$50 million libel suit against the paper.

Upon further acquaintance I learned that Lavelly and his handful of colleagues in the anti-tabloid bar despise the excesses of the three mass-circulation weeklies—the *National Enquirer*, the *Globe*, and the *Star*. To those on the receiving end, the excesses are quite real. The tabs routinely print con-

If there is
one thing the
tabloids
fear, it is the
Godzilla
plaintiff—
the wealthy,
aggrieved
celebrity who
just keeps
on coming.

fidential medical information about celebrities, or compromising, invasive photos of them. The reporters harass, bribe, and eavesdrop in their pursuit of tab-worthy stories. I suppose it's a character failing, but I like the tabs. For one thing, they have a puckish sense of mischief, borrowed from London's Fleet Street, which is sorely lacking in America's self-important mainstream newspapers. In surveys hardly anyone admits to buying the tabs. "I glance at them in the check-out line" is the stock response. But *somebody* must be buying them; five million copies are sold each week.

I occasionally buy them. I enjoy a half hour at the kitchen table savoring their outlandish tales

("TINY POOCH FIGHTS OFF KNIFE-WIELDING MANIAC TO SAVE TEEN"), oddball investigations ("GOVT. PLANS TO WASTE \$15 MILLION KILLING 800,000 HELPLESS ANIMALS"), and offbeat features ("SWIMSUITS MAKE WOMEN STUPID"). I've kept half an eye on the evolving Elizabeth Taylor-Larry Fortensky soap opera, and I'm not too proud to ogle some leafy telephoto pix of Brad (Pitt) and Jennifer (Aniston) cavorting in their Caribbean hideaway—before I read Richard Holbrooke's latest fascinating op-ed piece on Kosovo, that is.

So, listening to Lavelly's tales of suing, shoving retractions down the tabloid editors' throats, and scoring big-dollar judgments against the weeklies, I said to myself, Why would anyone want to do that?

CAROL BURNETT TABLOID SHOCKER!

ONE answer to that question is, Because it is possible. The modern era of tabloid litigation began on a spring morning in 1976, when Barry Langberg, a thirty-three-year-old entertainment lawyer, accepted a phone call from the comedienne Carol Burnett.

"She called me up from New York, and she was in tears about this article that had come out in the *National Enquirer*," says Langberg, an intelligent, courteous whippet of a man whom his most ferocious opponent calls "the patron saint of the tabloid bar." Langberg, too, seems to have been dipped in

southern California's fountain of youth. Like every plaintiff's lawyer I interviewed, he is a relaxed but stylish dresser and enjoys a well-appointed office with a magnificent view of the dusky L.A. skyline. Twenty-odd years of suing the deep-pocketed tabloids has made many a comfortable career in the City of Angels.

Burnett explained herself: In a gossip-column item the *Enquirer* had reported that "a boisterous Carol Burnett had a loud argument with another diner, Henry Kissinger," at the Washington, D.C., restaurant La Rive Gauche. Then Burnett "traipsed around the place offering everyone a bite of her dessert." The tab recounted another altercation with a different diner, strongly implying that Burnett was drunk.

"She was truly hurt by the article," Langberg told me in his office. "Her parents were alcoholics; she had done a lot of high-profile anti-alcohol campaigns. She wasn't thin-skinned, but this article had a huge impact on her. At the time, there were tremendous obstacles to this kind of suit. *Times v. Sullivan* [the landmark Supreme Court ruling that granted the media extraordinary license when covering 'public figures'] was only twelve years old. There was a feeling that if you were a star, you had to take that kind of abuse—that it came with the territory. And the *Enquirer* had a pretty good record of getting out of trouble. I told Carol what the pattern was—that the *Enquirer* would make a lawsuit hard, long, drawn-out, and very expensive. And she answered, 'I've got the time, the patience, the resources, and the desire to do it.'"

Burnett proved to be the tabloid's worst nightmare: a determined, wealthy, principled plaintiff. She rejected settlement offers. The *Enquirer* published a retraction. She didn't care; she wanted to go to trial. When the case finally came before a Los Angeles jury, in 1981, she was as poised and charming on the witness stand as she had been in countless television specials. Sadly for the *Enquirer*'s (subsequently dumped) law firm, Rogers & Wells, the case had a plethora of "bad facts." In a deposition a Florida-based editor of the *Enquirer* said that he distrusted the source of the original report and had rewritten the item himself. A reporter testified that he had tried to fact-check the item one hour before deadline and failed. Two of the restaurant's employees came forward and said they had told *Enquirer* reporters that Burnett hadn't been drunk at all.

Burnett won \$1.6 million in damages. In 1986, after a series of appeals reduced the award, she and Langberg settled with the *Enquirer*, reportedly for \$200,000. Burnett donated a portion of her award to the journalism programs at the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Hawaii.

On the heels of her suit three dozen celebrities, including Rory Calhoun, Paul Lynde, Rudy Vallee, and Phil Silvers, filed look-alike suits against the *Enquirer*. "The *Enquirer* had thirty cases filed against them by people whose names are a fading memory on *Hollywood Squares*," says Langberg's longtime nemesis, Gerson Zweifach, now the *Enquirer*'s chief litigator. "After Barry rang the bell, it sent the message 'Bring 'em on!' It changed the entire landscape." The era of tabloid litiga-

tion—the extreme sport of First Amendment law—was born.

Tabloid litigation has taken us places the Framers never dreamed we would go. Describing *Burnett v. Enquirer* in his First Amendment history, *Make No Law* (1991), a puzzled Anthony Lewis asked, “Why should inaccurate gossip about [movie stars’] private lives deserve an especially high standard of First Amendment protection?” First Amendment lawyers speak knowingly of “the Kato law,” referring to a California court’s finding that O. J. Simpson’s former houseboy was defamed by the tabloid headline “COPS THINK KATO DID IT!” At the beginning of his eleven-page opinion in the most recent *Eastwood v. Enquirer* case, Judge Alex Kozinski allowed himself this moment of levity: “Did defendant falsely represent that plaintiff had given it an interview? . . . Enquiring judges want to know.”

“CREEPING TABLOIDISM!”

LAWYER CLAIMS

WHEN you say “supermarket tabloid,” most Americans still think of headlines like “JFK AIRLIFTED TO MARS” and “NEW JERSEY BABY BORN WITH THREE HEADS,” evergreen fodder for papers like the *Weekly World News* and *The Sun*. But when *Vanity Fair* calls the 1990s the “tabloid decade,” it is paying homage to the three “fact-based” tabs, the *Enquirer*, the *Globe*, and the *Star*. (The *Enquirer* and the *Star* are owned by the same company.) These newspapers all have large staffs of reporters and editors, some of them drafted from Fleet Street, who gather information and print stories more or less the way other journalists do.

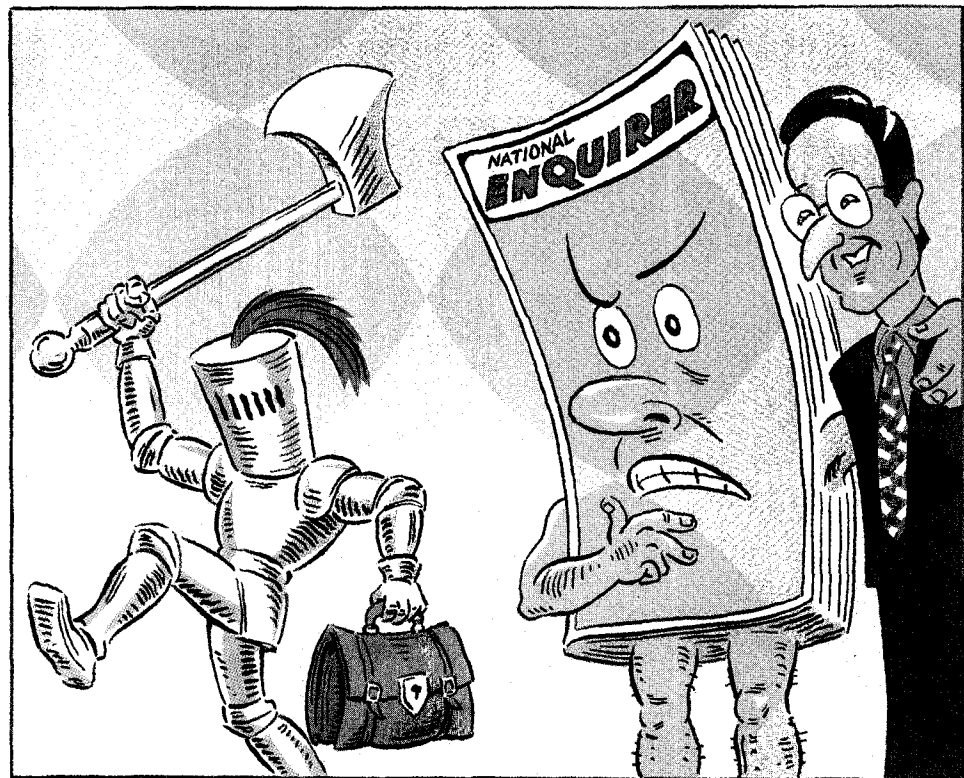
Sure, the tabs do things a bit differently. They pay tipsters, and in some cases they cross the line into entrapment. FBI agents briefly investigated whether Suzen Johnson violated prostitution statutes when she lured the veteran broadcaster Frank Gifford into a hotel room on behalf of the *Globe*, which paid her \$125,000 for her time, as it were. In addition to bribing personnel such as maids and hairdressers to the stars, the tabs use paparazzi with rifle-barrel lenses to stalk and shoot celebrities in their sancta sanctorum.

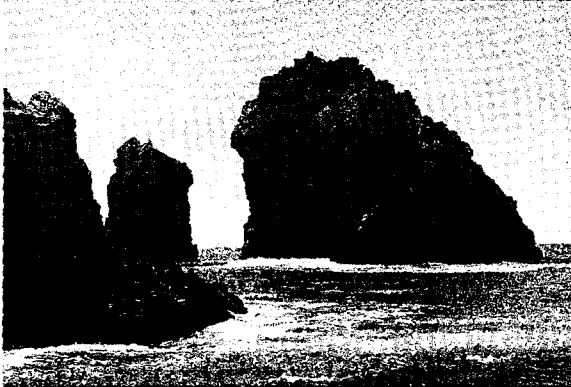
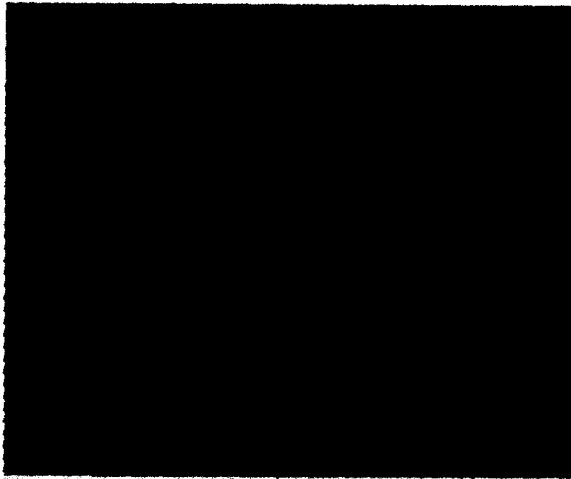
The tabloids say they have a heavy investment in accuracy. Michael Kahane, the general counsel for the *Globe*, explains that *Globe* reporters

compile extensive story files, consisting of notes, audio and video tapes, and documents, including “source agreements,” for every article. “Colleagues of mine say they wish their daily newspapers would use the same thoroughness that we do,” Kahane says. “Obviously, we’re approaching this from a different level of contention, because for us every story represents a potential lawsuit.” Lawsuits, of course, are expensive. A *voir dire*—to-verdict litigation costs more than \$1 million in lawyers’ fees. Damage awards are rare, but they can be big. The *Globe*, for instance, has been ordered to pay \$1.2 million to Khalid Khawar, a Pakistani freelance photographer. In an article summarizing a book, the tabloid erroneously accused Khawar of assassinating Robert Kennedy.

To forestall such snafus, the *Globe* has several in-house lawyers available to vet copy before publication. Kahane claims that the *Globe*, alone among the major tabs, regularly gives some of its sources (including Suzen Johnson) lie-detector tests. The Los Angeles lawyer Amy Hogue, who works with Kahane, says that *Globe* reporters routinely make telephone or fax “comment calls” to the subjects of controversial articles twenty-four hours before deadline. For his part Lively remembers more hurried morning calls than twenty-four hour notices: “Many times they’ll call and say ‘We’re going to press at noon.’”

The *Enquirer* employs an eight-person research department to help with fact-checking. The Washington, D.C., law firm of Williams & Connolly handles its prepublication legal review. (The *Enquirer*’s parent company, American Media, spent approximately \$20.8 million on libel-related costs, including insurance, legal fees, and settlements, over the past five years.)





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President Bill Clinton's lawyer David Kendall, a Williams & Connolly partner, is famous at the tab for green-lighting one of its most controversial stories, "LIBERACE'S SECRET BATTLE WITH AIDS." The elaborate review system notwithstanding, Langberg says, "Sometimes they make stuff up." Indeed, Kendall also handled the prepublication review of the piece that led to Clint Eastwood's most recent suit, which revealed that—unbeknownst to Kendall—the *Enquirer* had bought and printed a fictitious interview with the movie star.

But the tabs also get stuff right. Early in the O. J. Simpson case the *New York Times* reporter David Margolick acknowledged that the *Enquirer* had "broken numerous stories" relating to Nicole Simpson's murder. For instance, the tabloid was the first to report Simpson's purchase of a fifteen-inch stiletto. By dint of a Herculean search through photographers' archives, the *Enquirer* found and printed a photograph of Simpson wearing oversize Bruno Magli shoes like the ones that left footprints at the murder scene—shoes that Simpson had denied ever owning.

The tabs' circulation has been declining during the tabloid decade, supposedly because the mainstream press is becoming trashier—that is, more like the tabs. "Creeping tabloidism," Langberg calls it. Part of me thinks this is rubbish. On the other hand, as I wandered around Los Angeles interviewing lawyers, it was hard not to notice Monica Lewinsky's picture on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times* every day. (The Barbara Walters interview was about to air, and the Andrew Morton book followed shortly thereafter.) A few weeks before, the *New York Times* had printed a front-page story on Lewinsky's state of mind, attributed to "a friend"—the classic tabloid formula.

WANT TO SUE A TABLOID? MAKE MY DAY!

"Because the focus of the Company's publications on personality journalism often involves controversial celebrities or subjects, the risk of libel litigation arises in the ordinary course of the Company's business."

—American Media, 1998 Annual Report

TWO decades after Carol Burnett's victory, it's still hard to win a judgment against a tabloid. The First Amendment is a steep grade for any plaintiff's lawyer to climb. And as he or she struggles uphill, look who's rolling boulders down.

Take Gerson Zweifach, a trim, dark-haired forty-six-year-old First Amendment litigator at Williams & Connolly. Zweifach emerged from Yale Law School just as Williams & Connolly landed the *National Enquirer* account, and he cut his teeth on the post-Burnett lawsuits. "Some of these cases were tremendously entertaining," Zweifach recalls. "I had to defend the paper against a 'Hollywood personality' named Henry Wynberg. The *Enquirer* said he had exploited Elizabeth

Taylor. I learned that Henry had been charged in L.A. for giving Quaaludes to girls at Beverly Hills High School, and he had rolled back odometers. We went into court and said he had no reputation to lose, that he was libel-proof. That was a relatively novel argument at the time."

Zweifach seems to have been cast in the classic Williams & Connolly mold: he is smart, sardonic, and pugnacious. We had a conversation about Khalid Khawar's case against the *Globe*, which had overlaid a thick arrow on a group photo in an effort to identify (wrongly) Khawar as Robert Kennedy's killer. Speaking of Khawar's dogged pursuit of his claim, Zweifach said, deadpan, "Some people just don't have a sense of humor." During a lengthy interview in his Washington office he fussed and fidgeted, and confessed to the litigator's love of combat: "I like to be in court." He praised Barry Langberg with words similar to those that Margaret Thatcher used to praise Mikhail Gorbachev: "I can do business with Barry. At heart he's a trial lawyer. I'm a trial lawyer. We like to try cases."

Earlier in his career Zweifach worked on the "review group"—a rotating coterie of Williams & Connolly lawyers who fly down to the *Enquirer*'s Florida headquarters to read the newspaper each week before publication. Zweifach hated it. "It was like being a cornerback in football. The only time anyone remembered your name was when you got burned on an eighty-yard pass. I'd rather come into a situation where the only place we have to go is uphill."

Zweifach's wish has been granted. Several years ago he litigated, and lost, the Eastwood case, which was uphill from the get-go. Clint Eastwood, the plaintiff, hated the *Enquirer*, and had settled a lawsuit against it ten years before. And like *Burnett*, *Eastwood* was chock-full of "bad facts" for the *Enquirer*.

On its cover the paper had trumpeted a lengthy "exclusive interview" with Eastwood. Unfortunately, the interview never took place. The paper also claimed "exclusive" access to a photo of Eastwood's new baby, born to his former girlfriend, Frances Fisher. But the jury learned that a photographer had taken a picture of a baby photo from a distance when Fisher handed the snapshot to the actor Daniel Baldwin at a movie premiere. "If she didn't want the world to see a photograph of her daughter, she shouldn't have held it up," Zweifach grouses. "She's there to pump a movie; the photographers are there to take her picture." But even he allows that this particular intrusion overreached. "Eastwood used the photo very effectively at trial. In front of a jury you don't want to be making a legally correct, unappetizing argument about why you printed someone's baby photo without their permission." Fictional interview, purloined photo: the judge and jury awarded Eastwood \$800,000.

But a case with even worse facts for the *Enquirer* ended differently. In 1993 Elizabeth Taylor, who had also successfully sued the weekly before, filed a lawsuit concerning a cover story that was ridiculously inaccurate. This time the *Enquirer*'s reporter was following up on a court filing by one of Taylor's neighbors, who claimed that Taylor's husband at the



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THE NATIONAL PEACE GARDEN



time, Larry Fortensky, had picked a fight over a shared fence. The reporter went to what he thought was the neighbor's house, opened his checkbook, and the *Enquirer* ultimately printed the resulting scoop on its cover: "LIZ & LARRY FORCE NEIGHBOR TO FLEE HIS HOME IN FEAR." But the reporter had interviewed the wrong neighbor. "This guy saw an opportunity," Zweifach says. "He took the money and he told this harrowing tale. They put his picture on the cover. It was a deeply

HENRY CLAY'S MOUTH

Senator, statesman, speaker of the House,
exceptional dancer, slim,
graceful, ugly. Proclaimed, before most, slavery
an evil, broker
of elections (burned Jackson
for Adams), took a pistol ball in the thigh
in a duel, delayed, by forty years,
with his compromises, the Civil War,
gambler ("I have always
paid peculiar homage to the fickle goddess"),
boozehound, ladies' man—which leads us
to his mouth, which was huge,
a long slash across his face,
with which he ate and prodigiously drank,
with which he modulated his melodic voice,
with which he liked to kiss and kiss and kiss.
He said: "Kissing is like the presidency,
it is not to be sought and not to be declined."
A rival, one who wanted to kiss
whom he was kissing, said: "The ample
dimensions of his kissing apparatus
enabled him to *rest* one side of it
while the other was on active duty."
It was written, if women had the vote,
he would have been President,
kissing everyone in sight,
dancing on tables ("a grand Terpsichorean
performance . . ."), kissing everyone,
sometimes two at once, kissing everyone,
the almost-President
of our people.

—THOMAS LUX

flawed piece." It's hard not to laugh at a goof-up like this, and even Zweifach cracks a smile when recounting the tale. "Look," he says, "libel law isn't journalism finishing school."

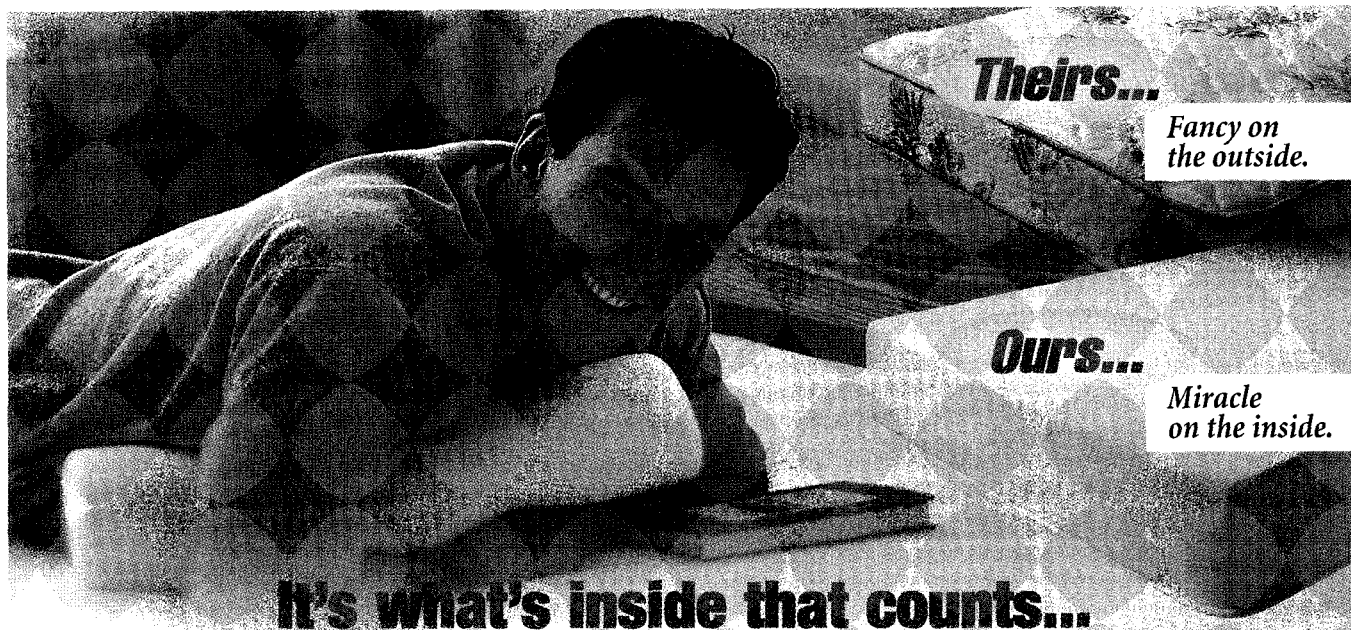
Remember *Times v. Sullivan*? A false report does not guarantee a libel judgment. As a public figure, Taylor would have to prove that the *Enquirer* had acted with actual malice, and had damaged her reputation. Zweifach says, "The judge ruled that the effect of our report was no different than if we had reported the court filing. He threw out the case." Taylor had sued the *Enquirer* for libel, and for "commercial misappropriation" of her name and celebrity. But California has an automatic fee-shifting claim in this kind of case, so the judge ordered Taylor to pay the tabloid \$432,600 in legal fees. "We tried to end the case, and she pushed it through two appeals," Zweifach says. "She kept losing, and we kept winning."

The victory presented a quandary for the *Enquirer*. The tabloid hadn't wanted to further anger Taylor, an audience favorite who appears—against her will, no doubt—in its pages about every other week. So after the final appeal the *Enquirer* staged a party at the Four Seasons Hotel in Palm Beach, where the editor, Steve Coz, announced that a portion of the award would be donated to the fight against AIDS, one of Taylor's favorite causes. A color photo of the check, "suitable for framing," Zweifach says, sits in his Williams & Connolly office.

CELEBS' LAW DIFFERENT FROM YOURS AND MINE!

LIBEL and defamation law is heavily stacked in the tabloids' favor. The same First Amendment invoked by Williams & Connolly to allow *The Washington Post* to publish the Pentagon Papers grants the tabloids enormous leeway in examining celebrities' lives. It's tough being a public figure, as a recently minted celebrity like Kato Kaelin can attest. Kaelin tried to sue the *Globe* for reporting that he had "confessed" to a friend that he helped O. J. Simpson to dispose of bloody clothing on the night of the attack on Nicole Simpson. A judge tossed the suit out of court. Kaelin's lawyer, Gary Bostwick, dolefully observed in the *Los Angeles Times* that his client was "a little guy who became a public figure overnight because he heard some thumping in the middle of the night."

Still, celebrity plaintiffs enjoy obvious advantages. The *Globe* lawyer Amy Hogue surprised me with her claim that she and her colleagues have "two strikes" against them when they walk into court. "People like judges, who don't read and enjoy the *Globe*, have an idea that its content is prurient, not true, and overly sensationalized," she explains. "It's harder to persuasively take the high ground when you're representing a tabloid." Furthermore, Los Angeles is home turf for the celebrity plaintiffs. "Even in L.A. jurors are very excited to be in the courtroom with a celebrity, very willing to believe a celebrity, and willing to reward a celebrity for perceived wrongs," Hogue says. She is famous in the California bar for



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a delicate 1994 cross-examination of the *Wheel of Fortune* letter-turner and celebrity survivor Vanna White. In a series of friendly questions Hogue had White tell the jury about two *Playboy* photo spreads and her visits to the *Playboy* mansion. "We had to be very careful, because at the time she had this image as the girl next door," Hogue recalls. She lost the case.

Dissatisfied with the flimsy protection afforded their clients by traditional libel law, plaintiffs' attorneys like Langberg, Bostwick, and Lavelly have devised creative new assaults on the tabloids. "For years the plaintiffs' bar has been looking to load up against our client," Zweifach says. In the suit concerning Elizabeth Taylor's neighbor, for instance, Taylor's lawyer included a "civil RICO" claim against the *Enquirer*, accusing it of mail fraud under the Racketeer-Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act. Still, tab lawyers routinely shift cases from state to federal courts, where, they believe, judges are less indulgent of outlandish legal appeals. (The added paperwork in federal courts also imposes a heavier burden on plaintiffs' lawyers, who are often working for a contingency fee.) In the Taylor case a federal judge quickly dismissed the RICO claim.

Zweifach believes that plaintiffs like to file "California boutique torts" other than libel and defamation in order to avoid the process of pre-trial discovery. It might not be wise for a star depicted as being drunk on a movie set to pursue a libel claim that would have the tabloid's lawyers digging

into his or her history of substance abuse. As noted, a famous enough star can pursue a claim of commercial misappropriation, complaining that the tabloid used the celebrity's image without permission to sell newspapers. This gambit worked twice for Clint Eastwood, in 1982 and in the interview-and-baby-picture case, which was finally decided in 1997. In the more recent case Eastwood won on all three of his counts—misappropriation, invasion of privacy, and an obscure claim under the federal Lanham Act, a consumer-protection statute aimed at penalizing companies that make false claims for their products. Eastwood's lawyers skirted the libel laws entirely,

admitting at trial that the offending interview was not defamatory. Their only gripe was that it had never taken place.

More recently, celebrities have sought refuge in contract law. Michael Jackson makes members of his entourage sign nondisclosure agreements. If one blabs to the tabs, as someone inevitably does, Jackson's lawyers can file an interference-with-contract claim. This has taken on absurd proportions: some celebrities have asked wedding guests to sign nondisclosure contracts as a condition of attending a ceremony that might attract the interest of the tabs. "That's so tasteful," Zweifach scoffs. "You open up the Tiffany invitation and this contract falls out of the envelope."

Moreover, celebrities' lawyers have been scoring some victories in the burgeoning field of privacy law, which has not been well defined by the courts. Judges and juries are now sympathetic to claims that seek to protect "private facts." For instance, Gary Bostwick successfully argued that the *Enquirer* should pay damages to Tamara Hood, the former girlfriend of the comedian Eddie Murphy, because it had told too much about her private life. A state appeals court acknowledged that Murphy was a public figure, and that his actions were "generally newsworthy." But when the *Enquirer* printed precise details of Murphy's financial settlement with Hood and their son, Christian (he had bought her a house and set up a trust fund for the boy), the court held that it had overstepped: "We cannot say as a matter of law that the details of a celebrity's financial support of his child and Ms. Hood's are newsworthy." The truthfulness of the report, which just a few years ago constituted an absolute defense, played little role in the court's decision. Bostwick says, "Because of the new use of these privacy torts, judges are ruling that the publication of truth cannot be sanctioned under all circumstances."

Another category of privacy law—trespass—has provided new opportunities for celebrity litigation, especially since the death of Princess Diana. In California celebrities have even succeeded in passing their own statute, outlawing so-called "constructive trespass" ("voodoo trespass," one of the defense lawyers calls it) by news reporters. The 1998 law allows for treble damages on journalists who intrude on "personal or familial activity under circumstances in which the plaintiff had a reasonable expectation of privacy . . . regardless of whether there is a physical trespass." Theoretically, this would put an end to helicopters hovering over Barbra Streisand's wedding, and to those snapshots I saw of Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston canoodling in the palms. ("Really? Where?" a concerned Lavelly asked me over lunch near his Century City office. "They're both clients of mine.")

It could have been worse. Schwarzenegger, Steven Seagal, and other stars initially lobbied state legislators for a fifteen-foot "bubble," or traveling restraining order, that would keep reporters and photographers two car-lengths away from celebrities. But Lavelly is happy with what they got. "Aggressive paparazzi behavior can lead to dangerous circumstances," he says. "Think about it—celebrities are high-risk

**Some celebrities
have asked
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disclosure
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condition of
attending a
ceremony that
might attract
the tabs.**

people in terms of stalking fans. Most of my celebrity clients have one or more stalkers or pursuers." Zweifach's position on "intrusive" photography is that bad behavior begets embarrassing pictures. "Let's say we get pictures of Bruce [Willis] and Demi [Moore] dancing on the bar at Planet Hollywood with their clothes off, and not necessarily with each other—this isn't the Mossad taking these photos!" The constructive-trespass law, which was opposed by the American Civil Liberties Union and by every major news organization in California, has yet to be tested in court.

But as the plaintiffs' lawyers stray from the familiar ground of libel and defamation law, they learn that new causes of action create new problems. Kato Kaelin's libel claim against the *Globe*, for instance, exposed him to an anti-SLAPP ("strategic lawsuits against public participation") motion. This exotic procedure has flourished in California, countering real-estate developers and oil companies that have used SLAPP suits to silence neighborhood groups or public-interest lobbies opposing their projects. A SLAPP suit essentially levels a defamation claim at the critic of a controversial project. The *San Francisco Chronicle* won a precedent-setting anti-SLAPP motion against a bothersome litigant in 1995, and the *Globe* did the same with Kato Kaelin. The judge accepted the *Globe*'s claim that Kaelin had filed a frivolous lawsuit, and slapped him with the *Globe*'s \$25,000 legal bill. "I can't win anything," Kaelin complained to the *Los Angeles Times*. "I can't understand a law where I'm paying this company's lawyers while they're writing libelous stories about me."

GOT A PROBLEM? MAYBE WE CAN SETTLE THIS . . .

LIKE most civil actions, the majority of tabloid lawsuits never come to trial. Often the celebrity's lawyers will file a claim, fire off a press release, and then quietly back off the suit. (One B-list actress issued a press release and then neglected to file suit against the *Enquirer*. When editor Steve Coz phoned her publicist, he learned that the star planned to make her filing coincide with an upcoming movie-of-the-week appearance.) Many of these suits are dismissed on summary judgment. But where the plaintiffs have a legiti-



mate claim, the tabloids are amenable to extrajudicial settlements, which can be interesting indeed.

The first level of mediation involves a retraction, which will satisfy many aggrieved celebs. Retractions are hard to obtain. "The chances of getting a retraction from any publication are about one in a hundred," Bostwick says. Bostwick has had bad experiences negotiating retractions with the tabs. "The retraction can even be more damaging, because they'll print the truth as they know it. For instance, they'll say, 'We erroneously reported that so-and-so was arrested for driving while intoxicated. In fact she was arrested for possession of drugs.' And then another few million issues will go to press repeating the damaging information. Or they'll repeat the allegation with some snide comment. You have to be careful."

In Langberg's office I saw a tongue-in-cheek draft retraction that the *Enquirer* wanted to print after inaccurately reporting that the magician David Copperfield "conjured up a pack of trouble when he offered to do a magic trick for a busty model at a party in Milan—and stuck his hand down her cleavage!" In a blithe note to readers, the editors suggested that they would like to make their mistake "disappear." Langberg frowns on this kind of high jinks; he held out for a straightforward admission of error.

Retractions can cut both ways. In 1997 the *Enquirer* forced Eddie Murphy to drop a \$5 million libel claim, reimburse its costs, and issue his own retraction: "After an investigation of the matter, Mr. Murphy has concluded that the *National Enquirer* did not publish its article about Mr. Murphy with malice or recklessly."

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Another Solomonic resolution is the “give-back,” or “make-up,” story, a follow-up article that corrects some earlier mistakes. Such resolutions are also full of pitfalls for angry celebs. “The tabs always want to use the settlement agreement to get another story, having the client’s participation,” Langberg complains. Still, it’s something. A classic give-back ran in the *National Enquirer* two years ago, headlined “SORRY, MATT PERRY.” The paper had erroneously reported that the star of the TV sitcom *Friends* had checked into a rehabilitation hospital for a drug problem. Although Perry had previous well-documented problems with substance abuse, he happened to be at the hospital ministering to his sick grandfather. “It was a horrible mistake,” Coz concedes. The give-back ran in the same space as the mistaken report, with the same headline size. No litigation ensued. Coz says, “It’s a great example of how fair the *National Enquirer* can be.”

The great unmentionable in tabloid warfare is the “blackout.” Very rarely, when threatened with significant legal repercussions, a tabloid will agree not to write about a certain celebrity for a while. According to *Los Angeles* magazine, lawyers for the comedienne Roseanne Barr obtained a lengthy blackout agreement from the *Enquirer* and the *Star* as part of a settlement following charges that reporters stole intimate letters from her. Lavelly and Langberg say they have each obtained a blackout but won’t discuss the clients involved. “They hate to give those,” Langberg says. Kahane says the *Globe* agreed to a couple of blackouts before he arrived, in 1995, but it doesn’t give them now. On the legal and ethical front a blackout amounts to prior restraint—the untouchable third rail of First Amendment jurisprudence. Bostwick, who is also a professor of First Amendment law at Loyola Law School, says he has never heard of a blackout agreement and would never seek one: “Asking for a blackout is contrary to my views.”

Sometimes out-of-court settlements have a winsome aspect. The actress Melissa Gilbert sued the *Enquirer* over a story that portrayed her as a “deadbeat Mom” who forced her children to watch reruns of her TV series, *Little House on the Prairie*. She dropped the suit, but as part of the settlement Gilbert asked for and received a meeting with Steve Coz. (“That’s rare,” Lavelly remarks, “because most people would like to wring his neck.”) “She flew down here, and we had drinks and dinner at the Delano Hotel, on South Beach,” Coz told me. “We had a terrific time. I think we have a budding friendship.”

TABLOID ARMAGEDDON!

IF there is one thing the tabloids fear, it is the Godzilla plaintiff—the wealthy, aggrieved celebrity who just keeps on coming. Carol Burnett was one: a celebrity of unimpeachable reputation, rich, willing to spend, animated by principle, and determined to punish her tabloid adversary. After being awarded \$1.6 million Burnett proclaimed that she would have been happy to pursue the suit for “one dollar plus cab

fare.” Clint Eastwood was another such plaintiff. After researching Eastwood’s behavior in a palimony suit filed by his former girlfriend Sondra Locke, Zweifach knew that Eastwood would be a tough nut. “Clint could have taken care of her, but instead he fought her, and she gave him years of bad publicity. He’s a very stubborn man”—\$800,000 worth of stubborn where the *Enquirer* is concerned.

Now the Twin Towers of tabloid litigation, Langberg and Zweifach, are squaring off again. Langberg has a Godzilla client—the lifestyle diva Martha Stewart. “She has all the earmarks of the celebrity who will go to the ends of the earth to get a judgment against us,” Zweifach says. “She looks like she will walk through fire. Here’s a stunning fact: she sat in a Connecticut courtroom for several hours day after day in a battle with a gardener over a \$20,000 bill. This could be a humdinger.”

Two years ago the *Enquirer* printed a story headlined “MARTHA STEWART MENTALLY ILL.” The *Enquirer* quoted two mental-health experts, a doctor and an author, opining that Stewart “shows indications of a neurological brain disorder.” They arrived at their conclusions after reading excerpts from Jerry Oppenheimer’s *Just Desserts*, an unauthorized biography of Stewart, which was serialized in the *Enquirer*. Stewart is understandably upset that an audience of two and a half million readers may think she is mentally ill, on the say-so of two purported experts who have never met her. One curiosity in the case is that the sources approached the *Enquirer*, not vice versa. “That’s a good fact for us,” Zweifach says.

Stewart’s “claim for relief” is only three pages long—what Zweifach calls a “clean, pure” Barry Langberg filing. “The . . . statement and headline published in the Article are false and defamatory and expose STEWART to contempt, ridicule, and obloquy,” the suit reads. The “defendants made the defamatory statements alleged above knowing that they were false, or with reckless disregard for truth.” It’s Libel 101. No RICO, no Lanham Act, no “commercial misappropriation” or “constructive trespass.” In lapidary prose that would make his law-school professors proud, Langberg requests \$10 million in general damages, with punitive damages to be awarded at trial.

Langberg is itching to go. “Martha’s strong-willed; she has principles; they lied,” he says. “We’re going to go to trial, and we’re going to win. I just hope Gerson doesn’t make me an offer that’s so good I have to advise Martha to take it.” When I spoke with Zweifach in Washington, he was gleefully pawing through the Oppenheimer book, a running sewer of derogatory allegations about Stewart. He said he couldn’t wait to get into the ring against Langberg and his mega-wealthy client. “Anyone running a business called ‘Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia’ is going to have millions of dollars to throw at this.” I spoke with Zweifach again after the two lawyers had agreed to prolong the pre-trial discovery period. “We both agreed to extend it, since we’re busy loading up with psychiatrists. Barry will have his psychiatrists, we’ll have ours. Mazel tov! That’s the First Amendment. That’s what’s great about America.”

Comparative Religion

by LYNNA WILLIAMS

When I was eight, I went down the aisle one day and told
my father I had accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior.

I was sure that saying I believed, out loud in front of
everyone, would somehow make it true

WHEN my father was away, what my mother did was drive. He was in San Antonio, preaching a three-day revival, and all day in Mrs. Richards's class I'd been picturing my mother closed up tight in our house, waiting until something told her to go get into the Lincoln. In world history, an hour before the last bell, I could feel my mother opening the car door in her navy-silk shirtwaist and spectator pumps, her dark hair feathering her ears. *Wait for me*, I thought. I didn't know I'd said it out loud until Patty Bailey leaned over her desk behind me. She said, "It's too late, Ellen. Columbus already sailed." I wanted to tell her to shut up—that her mother was safe inside their house, watching *The Price Is Right* on TV. I tried to imagine what I'd do if this time my mother didn't wait for me—if this time I went home and the car wasn't there.

I put my head down on the cool of the desktop, just for a second. Then I heard the stabbing sound Mrs. Richards's little heels made on the tile floor. I sat up, sure that she was coming to ask me what was wrong, but she was headed the other way, toward the door, where the principal stood with a girl I'd never seen before. The three of them talked, and then Mrs. Richards did her duck walk to the blackboard, bumping the girl along in front of her.

"Class, this is Hester Sarah Solomon," she said, and then

waited for us to do our part, which was a big, phony "Hello, Hester Sarah." Half the class gave up in the middle, though, because the new girl so clearly didn't care. She had turned halfway to the window and was staring out at the empty playground as if it were the big screen at the Starlite Drive-In. The dress she had on was the color of applesauce, and so big that she had bunched the skirt in her fists to keep from tripping on the hem. Her

hair was baby-fine and blonde, done up in an old-lady bun at the top of her head, and someone had jerked the hair back from her temples so tightly that her eyes looked almost Chinese.

Mrs. Richards wanted to get back to Christopher Columbus. She reached out to touch the new girl's shoulder, to

make her face the class, and Hester Sarah swiveled her head around. When I saw her face, I forgot about the Starlite Drive-In; Hester Sarah looked as if she'd been startled awake and didn't like it, not one bit. That was how my mother looked when we had been driving a long time and a car coming at us honked because our lights weren't on. When my mother finally saw the nighttime, she always said, "I am the light of the world" as she felt for the switch at the side of the wheel. That was a Bible verse, but it sounded more like one when my father said it.

"Hester Sarah's family came to Abilene from Oklahoma



City," Mrs. Richards said. "She has one brother in junior high and another in kindergarten, and her father is the new pastor of—" Mrs. Richards skittered to a stop.

"Gates of Grace Holy Apostolic Community," Hester Sarah said. She rolled the words out like a banner, and I knew exactly how she would sound quoting Scripture.

Mrs. Richards chipped in an "Oh, yes," but without conviction. Like me, she was used to churches with "First" in their names—churches like my father's, where she sang soprano in the choir. I said the name of the Reverend Solomon's church in my head; I knew that apostles were disciples, and that the gates of grace must be the way into heaven. But "Gates of Grace Holy Apostolic Community" used up too many words, the way Patty Bailey did when she brownnosed my father on Sunday mornings: "Oh, Reverend Whitmore, your sermon was just so holy, and righteous, and beautiful."

The other girls in the room were making little cawing sounds over Hester Sarah's dress, led by Patty, who now swung one leg out from under her desk and caught mine. "You can go to each other's church," she said, and snorted through her fingers. "Maybe she'll lend you something to wear." Patty said it loud enough for Mrs. Richards to hear, and Mrs. Richards charged halfway down the row to threaten her with study hall. Hester Sarah had heard too, but she went back to watching the playground. I'd gone a whole ten minutes without thinking

about my mother, but suddenly I was sure she was still in our driveway. She'd have the nose of the Lincoln pointed toward Fitzgerald Street so that she could see me cut the corner at the top of the block.

Mrs. Richards finished with Patty and went back to the front of the class. She asked Hester Sarah to take a seat, and pointed to a desk at the end of my row. Hester Sarah started toward it, but when she was even with Patty Bailey's desk, she stopped. Just like that, she leaned over and put her face next to Patty's. She was staring at Patty's cheeks, which every girl in the room knew had been dabbed with Tangee Junior blush before the eight-thirty bell. "Whore of Babylon," Hester Sarah said, as if it were the answer to a question. Before Mrs. Richards could get to her, she said it again.



WHEN I ran down Fitzgerald Street, the trees and the other houses seemed not to be there. All I could see was my mother's face inside the car. I ran harder, but she had seen me and was already pulling out of the driveway to come meet me. I stepped off the curb into the street, and my mother leaned over to throw open the passenger door. "Come on," she said, "I've been waiting," which was what she always said, as if I had deliberately held us up by going to grade school.

I threw my book bag into the back seat, and my mother

POEM FOR THE END OF THE CENTURY

I am the dreamer who remains
when all the dreams are gone,
scattered by the millennial winds
and sacked by the roadside.

The solar clock hand stopped:
confusion and fury on the street
—so much idle paper
shredded and tossed aside.

The small, dim shops of the tourist
trade are shuttered and locked . . .
Nightfall, and the buyer turns away.

One more stolen fortune spent:
another century gone
with its fits and desolations—
I leave my house to the creditor wind.

Tell me if you know my name,
whose face I wear, whose stored-up
anger fades to a tentative smile.

I am the one who touches fire,
who rakes the leaves to watch them burn,
and who says once more to himself
on this calm evening of earth:

Awake! The stars are out,
mist is on the water,
and tomorrow the sun will return.

—JOHN HAINES

took off before my right leg was all the way in the car. I didn't tell her how that felt, the sensation of my best penny loafer pulling along the street. I just lifted my foot into the car as fast as I could and tugged the door shut.

"Safest place to be is in a car," my mother said, and I nodded, because I knew she believed it. She drove slowly and carefully on the city streets, where someone my father knew might see us, but then we were out of Abilene and on the highway. I pushed myself up until I could see the buildings downtown shimmering in the rearview mirror, like a cartoon mirage. Just then my mother hit the brake, hard, to get off at the exit to Sweetwater, and I had to stretch my legs out to keep from falling. I knew we weren't going to Sweetwater. We weren't going anywhere; we were just driving around.

Sometimes when we were in the car together, my mother talked the whole time, not to me exactly but out loud. She usually talked about something she saw: a house with a fluttery windmill reminded her of flying in a plane; little kids stepping off a school bus made her wonder if the road was safe to cross. Other times she was quiet, and if I tried to talk, she shook her head no. This time she didn't say a word for hours. I didn't look at the clock—she didn't like that—but once or twice I saw the odometer turn over. We were going in a circle, I thought, and I was trying to imagine how Mrs. Richards could make this a story problem in math: Mrs. Whitmore leaves her house at 3:00 P.M. and drives a million miles. Why doesn't she just go home?

Then we turned off on a farm-to-market road, which looked like a skinny black line drawn through acres and acres of dried-out ranchland. On both sides of the road cattle bunched together at stock tanks, waiting their turn to drink. I was wishing I could draw a cow that didn't look like Lassie when my mother said, "Cattle." She did that sometimes, said what I was thinking, but I still jumped a little when it happened.

She slowed the car almost to a stop and watched the cows on her side of the road. "Look how close they are to each other," she said. "They don't like being alone; sometimes, in a storm, they crowd together so tight that one of them suffocates."

I must have made a sound, because my mother looked over at me. "We're safe, Ellen. We have room, and we can breathe, and nobody can get in unless we let them. And if they try, we'll just drive away."

Nobody had ever tried to get in the car, and we were still driving away. I didn't say that out loud, though; this wasn't school. At school, if I thought Columbus was crazy to get in that dinky little ship, I said so to the whole class, and all that happened was that Mrs. Richards said, "What does the book say about your question, Ellen?"

My mother pressed down on the accelerator, and in a minute the cattle were behind us. After another mile she started to beat on the steering wheel rhythmically with the flat of her hand; she kept looking over at me, as if somehow I wasn't doing my part. As far as I knew, my part was to sit in the front seat and hope that my mother wouldn't drive us to the edge of the world.

But things changed with her; that was the point. So I opened my mouth. What came out was how I'd missed "indefatigable" in the practice spelling bee, and about "Moirra, My Darling," an Irish ballad that Mr. Pitts was teaching us in chorus.

It was almost dark, and I didn't know where we were anymore. My mother was still thumping the steering wheel, and I tried to think of something else. "We have a new girl in our class. Her father's the minister of a little church; it could be somewhere out here." I drew in my breath and let it out slowly. "It's called Gates of Grace Holy Apostolic Community." My eleventh birthday was four months away, but I'd started sixth grade that fall with kids who were already twelve. I was in the best reading group, the one named for a bird of prey. But "apostolic" still sounded wrong, not the way Hester Sarah had said it.

I said the church name again, but I didn't stop there. I knew I could tell my mother the rest of it, what Hester Sarah had said to Patty, and not just because "whore of Babylon" came from the Bible. Most of my friends' mothers had baby names for anything to do with people's bodies. Patty's mother was the worst: on our last choir trip Mrs. Bailey had gone up and down the line asking the girls if anyone needed to wee-wee before we left. At least when my mother talked to me, she called things by their right names. "Patty made fun of her," I said, "and the new girl called her a whore of Babylon."

My mother was so still that I looked to see if the car was moving in a straight line, afraid that somehow she had fallen asleep. I was half reaching for the wheel when she said, "Christ on the cross." I pulled my hand back and closed my eyes. Nobody's mother talked like that. The car filled up with the words, like a birthday balloon on a bicycle pump, and my mother's face expanded. She was looking at the road, but her right hand came off the wheel and floated near her mouth. "Gates of Grace," she said through her fingers. "Gates of Goddamned Grace."

The car skidded a little, and the driver of a pickup truck coming the other way leaned on his horn. My mother blew out her breath, and just as the pickup passed us, she jerked the Lincoln over to the shoulder and then straightened it again. I didn't try to stop myself from sliding off the seat. The dashboard was right there, and I pushed my forehead into it. I closed my eyes and thought of Tweety Bird tricking Sylvester the Cat. Something else I'd learned about riding with my mother was that if I hurt myself, even a little, she'd stop the car.

She said "Ellen" once, and then again, and then "Jesus." But she wasn't saying a prayer. She pulled onto the shoulder, and when the car stopped, she jumped out and ran around to my door. I stayed where I was, not moving, and my mother opened the door. She sat sideways on the seat, her feet spraying gravel underneath, and pulled me up into her arms.

I let her push back my bangs and feel my forehead. After a minute she stopped saying my name, which worried me a little, and I opened one eye. I had to be careful: the point was to

get us home, not to a hospital. At a hospital they'd see I wasn't hurt; I couldn't be sure what they'd see about my mother.

"Mama, what happened?" I tried to make my voice all puzzled and sweet.

"You threw yourself on the floor, that's what happened," my mother said, and she let go of me. She left the car and began to slide down the embankment. I waited for a minute, pinching my forehead a little because I wanted to, not because crying was going to get me anywhere. When my mother didn't come back, I got out of the car and started toward her. I kept one foot turned out, so I could run if I needed to.

I had almost reached her when she said, "You stay there, Ellen Ann. Stay there and think about what you did."

I said I was sorry, and I was. I was sorry that my father was in San Antonio. I was sorry that cars had been invented.

"You're all alike, you know that? You and your father and your little friend who calls people names. You won't let anyone alone. You won't let them be." She spoke breathlessly.

I moved my head, just a little, in case a nod was what she wanted.

"You could have told me you wanted to go home," she said. "But you didn't do that, did you? You pretended you were hurt to get your way, and you didn't care how you made me feel."

If I had said "I want to go home," we'd be in Mexico by now, but I didn't say so. Maybe she'd forgotten, but once she drove so far that we had to spend the night in Arkansas in a motel with a giant horse on the roof. I hadn't cried then, and I wasn't going to now. All I did was wait. The light was gone, and our bodies blended in the dark, ran together, until all our edges were gone. "We were having a nice drive, and you ruined it," my mother said. "Next time you can just stay home; what do you think about that?"

Now was the time to cry, to say how sorry I was, to swear that we could drive a million miles, a trillion, and go home only when she wanted. I was getting ready to, but a car passed by, and the headlights threw me off, pulled my eyes to the road. I wondered who was in that car, and then, even though she was one good reason I was standing in weeds, I thought of Hester Sarah Solomon. Hester Sarah's family would be singing, I thought, an old hymn like "Just As I Am" or "Abide

With Me." Or maybe she and her brothers were counting stars, while her father told them about God's holy firmament. Maybe they were coming home from getting ice cream to celebrate Hester Sarah's first day in a new school. I almost smiled, but then my mother passed me on the way to the Lincoln. She was inside before I could climb up the embankment, and when I got to the top, the car was already rolling. I waited, counting the heartbeats under my hand, and when I got to five, I started to run.

FIRST Baptist, my father's church, had a smooth green lawn, nineteen steps up to the sanctuary, eight ivory columns, and a stained-glass window for every disciple but Judas. Andrew fished from a little wooden boat, bobbing on a slash of blue; James and John mended their nets between





two fig trees; Simon Peter, who was my favorite, had a two-part window, like an episode of *Bonanza* that began one week and ended the next. On top he sat at the Last Supper, elbows on the table, promising Jesus that he would never, ever betray him; below he denied to a mob of red and yellow dots that he had been a disciple at all. Bartholomew had a window, and Philip, and Thomas, and Matthew, and the other James, the other Simon, and Thaddaeus. Where Judas would have been, a lamb grazed at the foot of a cross. The cross was empty, because we were Southern Baptists, and our idea was that Jesus was up in heaven looking down. Never a moment passed when he wasn't watching over us, my father said every Sunday; the closeness of his watch was a measure of how much he loved us.

But inside our house on Fitzgerald Street, for every "In Jesus' name we pray, amen" that my father said out loud at

with my father, too. Once, when the three of us sat down to breakfast, she looked right at me and said, "Herbert, pass Daddy the butter, please. You need a haircut, Herbert—how can you see with all that hair in your eyes?"

Across the table, my father began to fold his toast in half.

"I'm a girl," I said, because that was my only line.

"Herbert Ann, then; pass Daddy the butter," my mother said, and when my father raised his head, she started to laugh. He sailed the toast high over the table, and it touched down in her open hands.

AFTER she came home, my mother was fine for a long time. If anybody wanted to ask me, she was still fine. The driving around had started in the summer, but I hadn't said a word to my father. I had thought and thought about it: I

meals, for every Bible verse, for every sermonette on God's love and God's law, exactly two commandments really mattered. The first, "Don't hurt your mother," was my father's. The second was "Don't tell on her," and that one was mine.

WHEN I was little, my mother was crazy. She went into the hospital when I was three, and came out, and went back in. When she was out, she lived with my grandparents up in Kansas City. I was five and a half when she came home to Abilene. She had a special brass case for pill bottles, and an address book with nothing in it but doctors' names, and—I remembered this on my own—some missing hair in back, because apparently my grandmother's beautician had problems of her own. In all that time my father had prayed maybe a million prayers for her, and the Sunday after her return he told a packed church that Anna Starr Whitmore had been restored to us by the loving hand of God.

When my mother came home, the clean and quiet of her own house made her smile, and every day after breakfast she lingered in a different room, relearning it, relearning us. She memorized my dolls' names, and brewed real tea for my tea parties on the screen porch. She came to every one of them dressed in her Sunday clothes. And she played

couldn't tell my father without hurting my mother. So when he left town, I ran all the way home after school, and when my mother pulled out of the driveway, I got into the car.

When my father was home, my mother did her best: she never missed a beauty-shop appointment or a Women's Missionary Union meeting at church, and when he held the passenger door open for her, she hopped right in. She wore hats on Sundays, pastel ovals outlined with lace, and as my father drove, she listened carefully to the sermon he was about to give. "Grace is never earned," he had said the week before, and my mother had said right back, "Then grace shouldn't work." He laughed and told her he'd change it to "A state of grace is never earned." My mother smiled, and for just that long I saw what my father saw.

But it wasn't always Sunday morning. And then one day I thought about my mother all the time. One day in school we did an experiment in science class. Mrs. Richards pumped air into a plastic bag, a little at a time, and we watched it swell and swell until finally the bag popped. Even though I'd known it was coming, I still jumped—and that was when I pictured my mother living in a see-through bag, watched by my father, and the choir, and the Dorcas Ladies Bible Class. The thing was, the car was bigger than a plastic bag. And in the car I was the only one watching her.

At times, when my father was home, when my mother was trying hard to be well, I thought it would all work out. My mother could stay with us, and my father could keep his miracle, and all I had to do was get in the car. But when I told my mother about Hester Sarah Solomon and the Gates of Grace Holy Apostolic Community, I saw her face. I heard what she said. And I knew why my father's prayers for my mother had stopped working. My mother didn't believe in God. I had thought I was the only one.

MY report cards, every one of them all the way back to kindergarten, said I wasn't working up to my potential. But I had worked to believe in God. I tried much harder than I ever tried with fractions. When I was little, still expecting that one morning I'd wake up and be a Christian like everyone else, I was sure that believing was just a matter of time and effort. I mean, I took swimming lessons for years, and all that ever happened was I got wet. But one day I put my head under the water, I kicked out, and I could swim. Sooner or later, I believed, I'd bow my head one Sunday morning and be touched by the Holy Spirit, as my father always described it happening for him. I could close my eyes and, maybe, see Casper the Friendly Ghost, but that was it. I didn't stop trying, though. I never sat where I wanted to in church—in the last pew in the sanctuary, with the kids who chewed gum and wrote notes. I stayed up front, next to my mother, and I prayed. I gave my allowance to missionaries. I went to church camp. I sang hymns. Nothing happened.

So when I was eight, I went down the aisle one day at the

close of the service and told my father I had accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior. He kissed the top of my head, right there in church, and a week later he baptized me. I was sure that saying I believed, out loud in front of everyone, would somehow make it true. But all that happened was that I wasn't just a nonbeliever anymore. I was a nonbeliever and a big fat liar.

Hester Sarah Solomon believed. All you had to do was look at her to know that. And watching her, just for that minute when she said the name of her father's church in front of the class, I began to think about the possibility that nothing was wrong with my mother and me. Maybe something was wrong with our religion.

THE morning after I bumped my head, the house was quiet when I got up for school. My mother wasn't downstairs, and I didn't know whether she was awake or not. I knew she had been up late after we got home, because she'd cooked a stack of waffles for me to warm up. They were in the refrigerator, with a note on church stationery that said she loved me, and that she'd see me later. The note was an old one; she kept it in the junk drawer to use after our drives.

I walked backward most of the way up Fitzgerald Street, watching the house, half expecting to see my mother come outside to get an early start on sitting in the car. For the first time, I wondered if part of what made her do it was how many Bibles my father owned, the framed pictures of his seminary classmates, the watercolor of the hills above Jerusalem that hung over the fireplace.

I was on the school's front steps when I heard the first bell ring, and I cut across the main hallway to get to class. As I passed the principal's office, I saw Hester Sarah Solomon with a man I was sure was her father. They were in the outer office, and I watched Mr. Shipp come out to take them inside. Hester Sarah's dress, the color of tuna salad, was worse than the one the day before, and the Reverend Solomon was turning a gray felt hat over and over in his hands. With every rotation, the shiny sleeves of his sport coat snaked above his wrists. I could see he was a preacher from Hester Sarah's face. The whole time he talked to Mr. Shipp, her eyes were fixed on his mouth, as if she could see every word, in capital letters, as it came out.

The tardy bell rang, and I had to get past the glass wall of the office before I could run. All through first period I waited for Hester Sarah to come back. Finally the door opened, and there she was, with Mr. Shipp, exactly like the day before. But this time, when she came to the blackboard, she looked out at the class.

She toed the tile with her right sneaker, and I heard Patty whisper, "Woolworth's. Two pair for two dollars." But she said it really low, and when Hester Sarah looked our way, Patty sucked in her breath so hard she whistled.

"I have to say I'm sorry," Hester Sarah said, and closed her

mouth. Mrs. Richards sighed, a tiny sound like a dollhouse door shutting, and asked if Hester Sarah didn't have something more to say.

"I was wrong," Hester Sarah said, and as Mrs. Richards nodded, she added, "It's not up to me to say who's a whore of Babylon and who's not. That's up to God."

Hester Sarah lingered a little on "whore," but all Mrs. Richards did was flutter her hands. From the choked-off sounds behind me, I knew that Patty was about to cry, but she was quiet when Hester Sarah came down our row. The boys drew in their feet as she passed.

Mrs. Richards told us to get into our reading groups, and she put Hester Sarah in the lowest group, the one named for the state flower of Texas. I skipped my turn to read with the other Eagles so that I could listen to Hester Sarah, two rows over. She sounded out even baby words, like "farmer" and "weather." But I knew that the Ten Commandments were real to her. I knew that if I went up to her on the playground and said "Number eight," just like that the answer would come back: "Thou shalt not steal." I thought of her face when she looked at her father, and I thought that 99 percent of the Reverend Solomon's sermons were not about God's love, God's mercy, or God's eternal forgiveness. The Reverend Solomon would preach about sin, I thought—about casting out sin and demons, about escaping the flames of hell. The Reverend Solomon would preach about saving people, whether or not they wanted to be saved.

MY father had been home from San Antonio only two weeks when he had to leave for Dallas. I got up early, took the chicken legs left over from Sunday lunch out of the fridge, and wrapped them in tinfoil. I usually took money to school for a hot lunch, but Hester Sarah brought her lunch, and in a paper bag, not a lunch box. She ate alone; Patty Bailey had made sure that the other girls wouldn't talk to her. But Hester Sarah acted as if she had arranged to be alone, for the greater glory of God.

My parents weren't downstairs yet. I unfolded a grocery bag and threw in the chicken, three oranges, a plastic container of French green beans, another of creamed corn, and a slab of red-velvet cake. We always had little cartons of milk around from choir suppers on Wednesday nights, and I put in half a dozen of those. I filled a Thermos with apple juice. I put in some paper plates and plastic forks. I was picturing myself laying down a trail of leftovers, leading Hester Sarah right to me. When I couldn't fit anything else into the bag, I lifted it into my book bag, heaved the book bag off the table with both arms, and called upstairs to say I was going. I was almost down the driveway when the screen door banged, and my father called for me to come back. He walked part of the way to meet me.

"You're going without saying good-bye?" he said. "You know I'm leaving today, and you just go sailing out the front door?" He was wearing the pants of his suit already, but with

his blue-velour robe, the one my mother and I had given him for Christmas.

"I thought you were going next week." That was a lie. I had the dates for every revival meeting for a year marked off on the calendar in my room, but I knew he'd believe me. He'd believe anything.

"I'll only be gone for four days," he said. "The phone numbers are upstairs on my desk. You know you can call me, but I'll be home before you want to, probably."

We both knew what was next. "You and your mother take care of each other," he said, as if such a thing might actually happen. After a minute he reached out to hug me, and he felt the weight of the book bag on my shoulder. "Ellen Ann, what are you carrying around?"

I made my voice shake a little. "There's a new girl in my class who's hungry, I think. I'm taking some food so she'll have lunch with me." I tacked a little sob onto the end of the sentence.

My father leaned over to kiss my forehead. "You share your lunch every day if you want," he said. "When I get back, we'll see what else we can do." I let him knuckle-kiss my hand, a routine from my baby days, and then he stepped onto the porch. I hadn't even reached the sidewalk before I heard him call my mother's name, and I knew he'd gone back to watching her.

IN the lunchroom I wrapped both arms around my grocery bag and followed Hester Sarah, ignoring Patty Bailey, who wanted to know where I thought I was going. Hester Sarah went to one end of a table in the far corner, and I dropped into a chair opposite her. At the other end two kids I knew from the playground picked up their trays and left. Hester Sarah unwrapped her sandwich, smelly pink meat on white bread, while I took out what I'd brought. I had covered half the table before I started pulling cartons of milk out of the bag.

"You got a tapeworm?" she said, and smiled. Mrs. Richards had shown us way too many color pictures of parasites in science the week before, but I hadn't thought that Hester Sarah was paying attention. She kept a Bible open on her desk, and every day a new pamphlet was stuck between pages of the Old Testament. Mrs. Richards had given up trying to stop her, and she played with the pamphlets all day, standing them at different angles so that none of us could miss the red headlines at the top. Today's pamphlet asked, "Will You Vacation Eternally in the Fiery Pit?" The illustration was of a terrified family of four, with matched luggage, falling through space.

"Will you help me eat all this?" I said. I hadn't said boo to Hester Sarah since she'd started school, and I thought I'd have to explain why I was all at once her friend. But she waved her hand at me, as if temporal matters didn't concern her. After a minute I understood: if I was sitting at her table, God had sent me. This close, her Chinese eyes were the color of tap water. I

unwrapped the chicken legs, and Hester Sarah wadded up her sandwich without taking a bite.

"I haven't said the blessing yet," she said.

I nodded, careful not to turn my head to see if Patty Bailey was watching us. Hester Sarah put her hands together under her chin. "Heavenly Father, we thank thee for your bounty, and ask that you bless us this day, that all we do may be for thy glory. Keep us from Satan's path, O Lord, for truly we know his snares await even the most righteous. In Jesus' name we pray to be his apostles, forever and ever, amen." Her head stayed down, because I was late repeating the "amen." When I did, Hester Sarah opened her eyes and lifted a forkful of creamed corn to her mouth.

I was stalling now. I had imagined how this would go more than once, but Hester Sarah at the table was different from Hester Sarah in my head. A scary church was one thing that no one had tried with my mother and me. "I didn't see your brothers at recess," I said to Hester Sarah. "They're not sick, are they?"

"My brothers are doing mission work with our daddy over at Baird. When they grow up, the church'll be theirs."

"What do you get?" I felt my face go red, but she gave me that same never-mind wave of her hand.

"I get to love the Lord, and serve him all my days, and when I die, a place will be reserved for me among the ranks of righteous women."

I said "Oh," which was stupid but better than what I was actually thinking, which was "Big whoop." But Hester Sarah wasn't watching me. She had been alternating bites of green beans with chicken, her tongue flicking in and out of her mouth.

"Hester Sarah?" I said, as if she weren't right across the table, practically nose down in the red-velvet cake. "Can I talk to you about something?"

She bounced a little in her chair. "God's moving in your heart, isn't he? I've had a feeling all day that he was going to bless someone."

"All I know is I had to come talk to you." I crossed my fingers under the table. "There's this girl I know." I paused to see if Hester Sarah was buying that, but I didn't see any doubt on her face. Hester Sarah didn't have doubts—that was the point. "There's this girl I know, and she and someone

else in her family—it's her aunt, I think—don't believe in God. I was wondering what would happen in your church about something like that. How you would help them, I mean." I'd meant to make my voice shake, but the shakiness started without me.

Hester Sarah was looking at me as though "whore of Babylon" would be a major compliment. "I know they didn't want to be this way," I said. "It's just something that happened."

She had put down her fork and was sitting with her head tilted back a little, as if she were God's vessel and I were pouring my story into her. "The devil isn't something that just happens to you," she began. At "you" I felt something give in my chest. Then I realized she didn't mean me in particular. "Salvation doesn't just happen either. If you want to be saved, you have to believe in the Lord God. Looking for shortcuts is blasphemy."

She didn't have a bit of trouble pronouncing "blasphemy."



She was quoting her father, I was sure, and I tried to think of something my father said on Sunday mornings. "What about the healing power of God's love?" I said. Then I wished I hadn't. That was my father's big idea, and it wasn't working anymore.

"God heals those who bow before him, who worship his holy name."

I tried to imagine people lining up to join Hester Sarah's church. I spoke slowly, the way Mrs. Richards did when she taught long division. "What I asked you was how your church would help them believe. But it's okay if you don't know. I was just wondering."

I told myself that it was better this way. Hester Sarah ate with her mouth open, and my mother would die before she believed that that was God's will.

Hester Sarah's eyes were wet at the corners. She reached across the table, and her hand caught mine and held it. "Unbe-

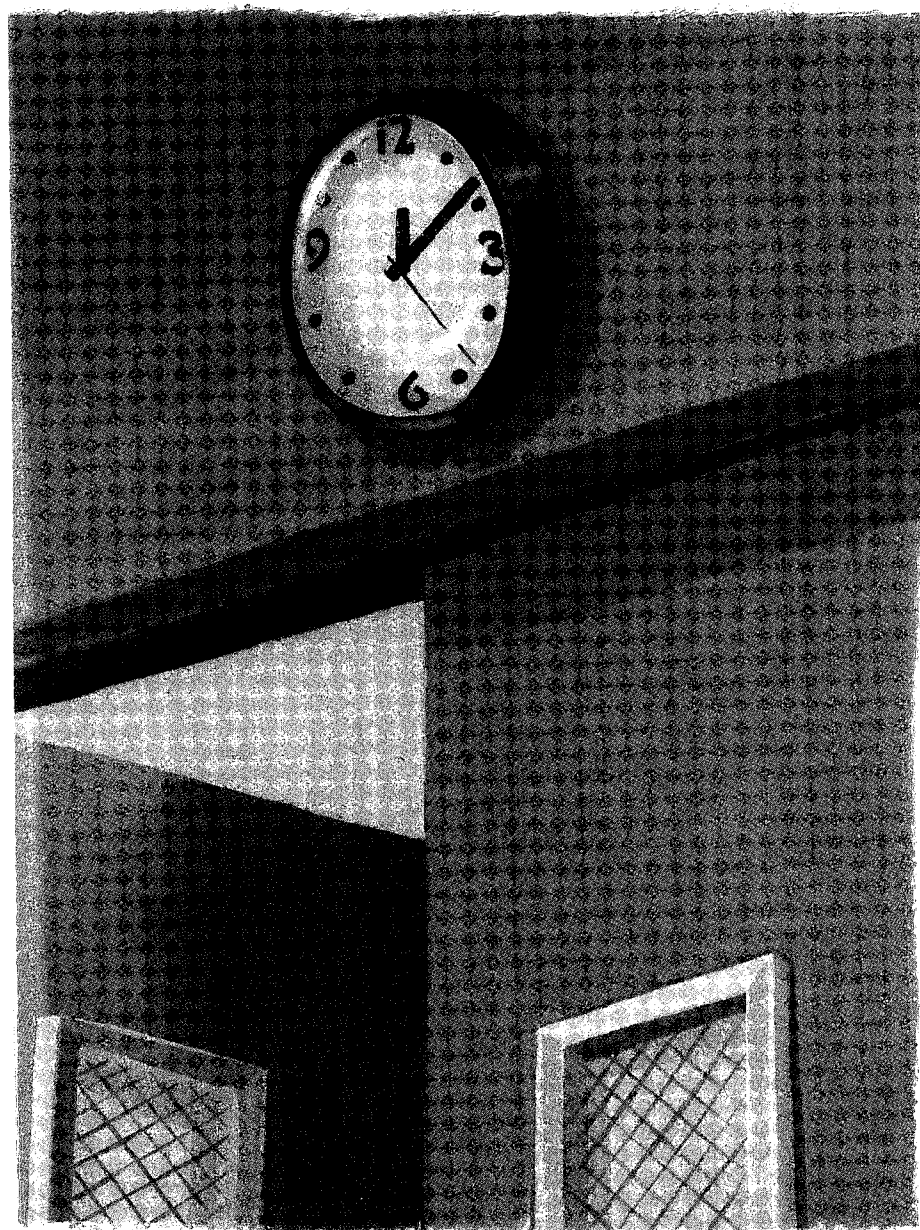
liever," she said. I realized that I'd never before heard Hester Sarah give a right answer.

"Quit it," I said. "You're not making any sense."

"God makes sense," she said, and I had to catch my tongue sliding out of my mouth. My mother could drive me around until I went to college; college wasn't that far away.

A tiny wrinkle appeared between Hester Sarah's eyes, and she got up right there in the lunchroom and, still holding my hand, marched to my side of the table. She stood over me, and every time I shifted away from her, she moved in closer, until her mouth was hot against my ear. "If thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, the Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart."

Hester Sarah was finished with me. She drew back her head and walked to her seat. She stacked the empty food containers and lifted them into my grocery bag. All I did was stare at her, as if no one in my whole life had preached to me. My mother is astonished of heart, I told myself. Just like that, there was one thing I believed.



A HALF hour before the last bell Hester Sarah was at the world map, sliding her finger up and down South America in search of Afghanistan. I tried not to look at her. I hadn't told on my mother, not exactly, but I had come closer than ever before. All I had to show for it was one "If thou wilt not hearken," which I didn't know for sure was a real Bible verse, and what felt like a whole chicken sideways in my throat.

I blinked. A watery Mrs. Richards was sending Hester Sarah back to her seat, but all at once Hester Sarah bent double, her hands on her knees, and started to cry. Some of her hair came loose, scattering bobby pins and streaming over her face. "It hurts," she said. "It really hurts." Mrs. Richards knelt by her, asking what was wrong, and then helped her into a chair. "Class, will someone please walk with Hester Sarah to the nurse's office?" she said.

No one volunteered, not even when Mrs. Richards asked a second time, but when Hester Sarah moaned, I couldn't stand it. I raised my hand and bounced my desk chair back onto Patty Bailey's foot, because she was the reason no one else had a hand up.

When Patty yelled, I pulled the chair free without saying I was sorry. Mrs. Richards and I walked Hester Sarah to the door. "Feel better, dear," Mrs. Richards said, and her hand hovered over Hester Sarah's back without actually patting it.

In the hallway I told Hester Sarah to hold on to my arm, and tried to feel good that I was helping someone less fortunate. But all I managed was to not say what I was thinking, which was that the devil and I were as pleased as punch to be taking her to the nurse.

Hester Sarah put her arm in mine, and we started down the hall. But at the corner of the passage that led to the nurse's office she swatted my hand away. "Come on," she said, and when I didn't move, "Do you want to do this or not? Hurry up before someone sees us."

"Do what?" I said, but when Hester Sarah started to run, I followed her. She slammed through the big double doors at the front of the school and ran down the steps. On the sidewalk I grabbed for her arm again. "What are you doing?" I said. "Aren't you sick?"

Hester Sarah shook me off. "Which way is your house?"

"What are you talking about?" I said. "We're going to the nurse."

She made a small, exasperated sound. "It's more important to go to your house, Ellen. We can tell your mother I missed the bus and need a ride home, and when we get there, my father will pray with the two of you. In Oklahoma City he brought a family of five to the Lord, and not one of them had ever been inside a church, not once in their whole lives."

"My friend and her aunt go to church," I said, bearing down on "friend" and "aunt." "They go to a beautiful church."

I didn't know what my face looked like, but Hester Sarah could have been smelling her sandwich again; her nose was wrinkled, and she was breathing through her mouth. She held up two fingers. "Number one, my church is beautiful, because we believe in God. And number two, I know you're talking about your mother not believing in God, not anybody's aunt. I heard Patty Bailey saying that your mother was sick when you were little. She's sick again, isn't she? The devil's got hold of her, and she's sick."

I was pretty sure now that Hester Sarah was in the wrong reading group. "Since when do you listen to Patty?" I said. "You should hear what she says about you."

"I listen to God," she said. "He wants me to help bring your mother and you into his presence. I know he does."

"Do your ears work?" I sounded like a little kid whose nose was running, even though it wasn't. "I didn't say anything about my mother and me." The sunlight was so bright that I had to squint to see her, and when I did, she had captured her hair in her hands and was piling it on top of her head.

"I thought you wanted to do something to help her," she said. "God led you to talk to me, but now you're afraid. Don't be afraid."

My mother was afraid of everything, I thought, except this; she'd never been afraid I would tell. I wished for the nurse,

Mrs. Richards, my father, for anybody but Jesus, to get me out of this. "I talked to you about my friend and her aunt, and that's the truth," I said carefully. "I mean it, Hester Sarah. I don't know what Patty said, but it doesn't matter, because tomorrow she'll tell people you made the whole thing up."

What was true was that I wasn't living up to my potential. I hadn't done my homework. I hadn't thought this through. At night when I had rolled my movie on the inside of my eyelids, my mother and Hester Sarah were barely in it. All I saw was me, the way it would be if my mother never stopped driving me around, if she never got better, if things were always the way they were now.

We hadn't gone beyond the sidewalk in front of the school, and I heard the last bell ring inside. I could feel the vibration all the way down my back. Any minute now kids from our class would storm out the doors and see us; Mrs. Richards would be right behind them. She would see us, and the principal would call my mother to come get me.

I turned back to Hester Sarah, who was trying to free the hem of her dress from between her sneakers. When she told her parents about this, both of them would be proud of her. Both of them would be at home until she grew up.

"Come on," I told her. "It's only five blocks."

She didn't think I meant it, but when I started down the sidewalk, she was right behind me, reciting one Bible verse and then beginning another, as if each were a point on a map. I didn't talk to her, or even turn around.

When we reached Fitzgerald Street, I knew before I looked that my mother was in the car. Hester Sarah had stopped, and I had to walk back to her. "These houses are huge," she said. "You live in one of these?"

I waited for the Bible verse about rich men and heaven, but it didn't come. What was coming toward us, right this minute, was my mother in the Lincoln. I left Hester Sarah on the sidewalk, yelling at me to stop, and I ran into the street. When my mother slowed down, I opened the door and threw myself inside. Hester Sarah was still yelling, but I knew my mother would think it had nothing to do with me.

We were almost at the end of the street before I raised myself up to look at Hester Sarah in the rearview mirror. I watched her getting smaller, but I didn't worry about her. She was standing in front of the Talliaferros' house, and the Talliaferros drank highballs in the back yard before dinner. Mrs. Talliaferro would call the Reverend Solomon to come get Hester Sarah, I was sure, and maybe he would save the whole family before he and Hester Sarah went home. Maybe next time she'd get her own mission trip to Baird.

I dropped back into the seat. When I looked over at my mother, I thought from her face that we might really be driving all the way to Mexico this time, and I closed my eyes. I pushed my head into the leather and imagined that it was night. My mother and I were safe in the car, riding and riding, and I asked her what she believed, what she held sacred, what women like us wanted most in all the world. ☼

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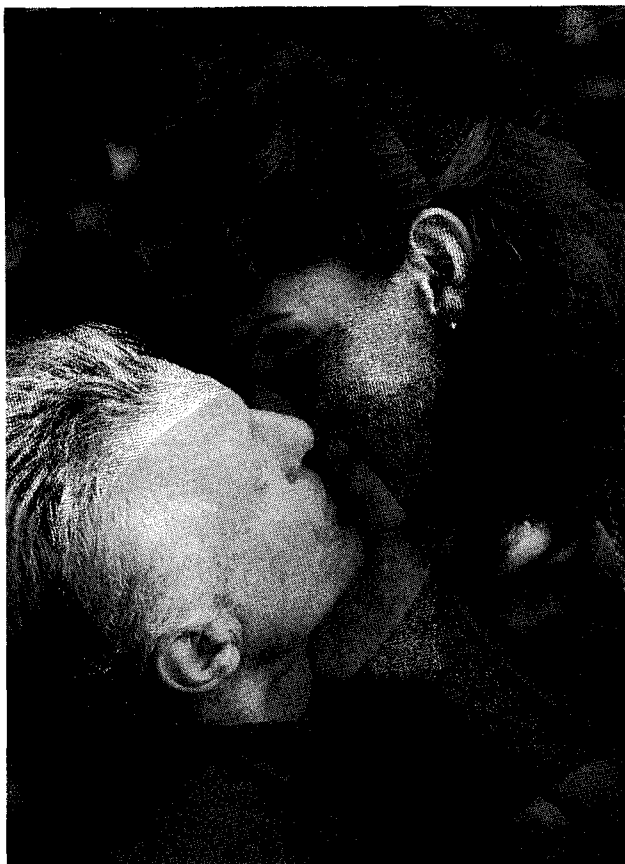
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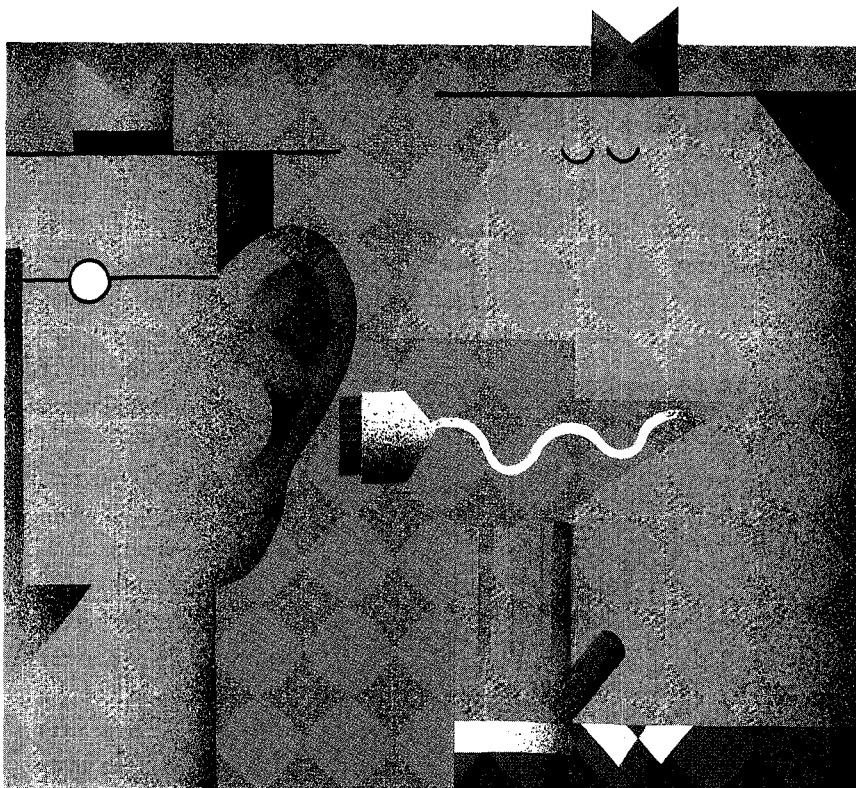
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Living With Linux

A new cost-free and crash-free alternative to Windows and Macintosh operating systems provides freedom at a price

A FEW years ago I worked on a small publishing project in northern California. As often happens now, the project was entirely edited and laid out on a computer network—four Apple Macintoshes in this case. Because the project had many pictures, which computers treat as very large files, we added a powerful new-model Mac to the network and a fancy laser printer that could produce photo-quality images.

To our dismay, the improvements broke the system horribly. We tried to fix it by every method we could think of: fiddling with configuration screens, deleting and reinstalling software, combing through the Internet for advice, calling technical-support numbers, cursing at the machines

while turning them on and off repeatedly. A hired computer consultant swaggered into our offices. Hours later he staggered out in defeat. Although we were not far from Silicon Valley, we couldn't find anyone who could fix our boxes.

by Charles C. Mann

By luck we eventually resuscitated our machines. But we still had no idea why they had so many problems, other than our incautious decision to revamp the network on the eve of a major deadline. Recently I have come to believe that the fundamental cause was one that hardly anyone would have named, even those few years ago: our software was proprietary. In other words, the manufacturers—Apple, in the main, but also Xanté, which made the printer—controlled the underlying instructions that made their

products work, and kept them secret. Much as no technician could repair a computer if the case were sealed shut, neither we nor our consultant could lift the lid of the software and peer inside to see why our network was down.

This is rapidly changing. Pushed by the growth of the Internet and a new operating system known as Linux, many software companies are considering whether to allow unrestricted access to the underlying instructions—the “source code,” in the jargon—of their programs. For the computer industry this is a turnabout. Until as recently as last year software companies almost invariably viewed source code as their single most valuable asset. Yet throughout Silicon Valley executives are discussing whether they will be forced, for the sake of corporate survival, to give away something they have always thought worth millions of dollars.

The notion is especially startling for operating systems. An operating system is the software that runs the hardware on a computer. When users of, say, Microsoft Word click on the PRINT button or type sentences, the program does not print the document or put letters on the monitor. Instead it passes the instructions to the operating system, which shuttles data from the hard drive to the printer or translates the keystrokes into onscreen characters. The two most familiar operating systems are Microsoft Windows and Mac OS, the Macintosh operating system. Microsoft and Apple are famed for their differences, but in one respect they are exactly the same: they have both used control of the source code to their operating systems as a competitive weapon. Indeed, Microsoft's competitors widely attribute its dominance to its lock on Windows. Nonetheless, Apple has already given programmers a small glimpse of its source code, and Microsoft has announced that it might do the same.

Opening source code is more than the latest news release in the software industry. It is the center of a small but increasingly influential movement—one that aspires to transform the world. Enthusiasts dismiss the grudging moves by Apple and Microsoft as too little too late, and confidently anticipate that Linux will topple Bill Gates's empire. Many believe that its widespread adoption will greatly

increase human freedom. Still others hope that Linux will reduce the gap between rich and poor nations.

No one can say whether any of this will come to pass, although the information age is sweeping society so rapidly and unpredictably that not even the unlikely outcomes can be dismissed. But it is clear that living with Linux, which I have been doing for a while now, is not at all like spending time with Windows or Mac OS. Whereas Windows and Mac OS are intended in part to shield users from their machines, Linux forces people to grapple with their relationship to technology—an experience that was for me both salutary and disquieting.

I'M writing this article with software called XEmacs. The program (its name derives, circuitously, from an abbreviation for "Editor Macros") is unlike any other word processor I've ever encountered. In addition to cutting and pasting text, XEmacs can run other programs; send electronic mail; browse the World Wide Web; retrieve, edit, and send files across the Internet; and keep track of appointments. It's like a digital Swiss army knife. Many hackers (a term used by computer cognoscenti to refer not to teenage vandals but to expert programmers and network administrators) open XEmacs when they come to work, use it through the day for every kind of task, and close it when they go home. Macintosh and Windows adaptations of XEmacs exist, but the program is used mainly on other operating systems, especially Linux.

XEmacs is a descendant of Emacs, most of which was written in the mid-1970s by Richard Stallman, a gifted hacker who has spent most of the past two decades working as a volunteer in the halls of the Laboratory for Computer Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. When Stallman began coding, proprietary software hardly existed. Computer makers like IBM and Digital threw in the programs needed to operate their expensive machines—the profits to be made were on hardware. In those long-ago days programmers freely passed their code around for colleagues to use, critique, and improve. Stallman thought of this as eminently sensible.

To many hackers, the rise of the commercial software industry came as an unpleasant surprise. Companies sell software in the form of zeros and ones on

computer disks. Like a translated poem that cannot be retranslated accurately into its original language, these zeros and ones cannot reliably be translated back into the original source code. Programmers were thus shut out when software firms began treating source code as a trade secret. To Stallman, this was a moral outrage—corporations were preventing people from learning about and improving their software. He decided to do something about it.

In 1984, Stallman founded the GNU Project, which worked out of donated offices at the MIT Laboratory for Computer Science. Its intent was to create a powerful and sophisticated operating system that was wholly free of proprietary restrictions—the source code could be copied and changed at will. To ensure that the software could never be kept secret, Stallman invented the GNU General Public License, which copyrighted the source code and released it to the world on the sole condition that any modifications would be covered by the same license—that is, could be freely copied and changed. This special form of copyright, Stallman said, should be called "copyleft."

GNU intended to duplicate the look and feel of Unix, which was then the most common operating system on big computer networks and the Internet. Invented in 1969 at Bell Labs (the precursor of Lucent Technologies), Unix has mutated into a dozen different proprietary versions, which today are available from IBM, Compaq, Sun Microsystems, and other companies. Stallman called his version GNU, for "GNU's Not Unix," an acronym that includes itself—the sort of trick hackers love.

The goal was almost ludicrously ambitious. The heart of an operating system is its "kernel," the switchboardlike software that shuttles zeros and ones among the keyboard, the mouse, the monitor, the hard drive, and the microprocessors. But the kernel does not run the computer by itself: it works in concert with hundreds of supplementary programs, including drivers, utilities, programming tools, and window managers. To create a complete operating system the GNU Project would have to write not only the kernel but also the surrounding software—hundreds of megabytes of code. It was like a group of friends deciding to build their own space shuttle in a basement.

Amazingly, the GNU Project did it—



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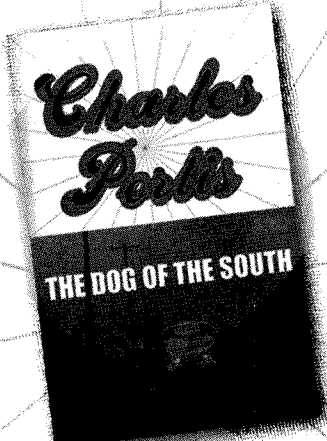
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or, rather, has almost done it. By the early 1990s hackers around the world were using GNU software, including "gawk," a programming language, and "groff," a document-formatting and printing system. But the project had not created a working kernel, partly because Stallman had decided not to pattern the GNU operating system on the Unix kernel but to build upon a stripped-down, ultraflexible kernel developed at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Utah. Unfortunately, producing a kernel that was not only small but also adaptable enough to do many things turned out to be exceedingly difficult. The GNU kernel is still under development; the latest release, version 0.2, appeared in June of 1997.

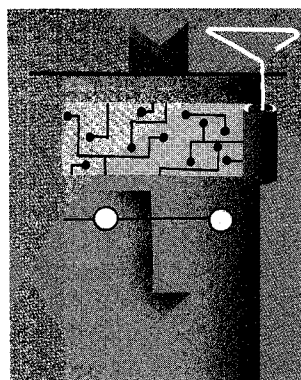
In 1991 Linus Torvalds decided to write his own kernel. Torvalds, then an undergraduate at the University of Helsinki, had just bought a personal computer: a 386 with four megabytes of memory. Like many hackers, he disliked MS-DOS—"MS-DOG," as GNU Web pages sometimes call it. But his computer was not powerful enough to run Unix. Scrambling together code from his instructors and merging it with his own work, he fashioned something like a Unix kernel. Because the GNU Project had put together the necessary subsidiary programs, he calibrated his kernel to work with them. The preliminary results appeared on the Internet in the fall of 1991. "Just a hobby," Torvalds explained in an accompanying note. "Won't be big and professional like GNU."

A few hackers downloaded his kernel, fiddled with it, and passed on the improvements, which Torvalds incorporated into the next version, which was downloaded by more hackers, who added still more improvements. The informal online collaboration snowballed Andy Hardy-style, until it included hundreds of computer jocks on five continents, all volunteering their time, all chipping in bug fixes and test results and new chunks of code. Torvalds had backed into creating a full open-source operating system similar to the one that Stallman had envisioned, incorporating all the available GNU software except the kernel. He called the system Freax, but a friend

thought the name was silly and to Torvalds's embarrassment rechristened it Linux (*Linn*-uks, after "Linus"). Version 1.0 was officially released in March of 1994. It was copylefted under the GNU General Public License.

Today Linux has millions of users, the kernel has reached version 2.2, and Torvalds has become the most famous computer programmer on earth. When I went to hear him speak in Anaheim, in 1997, the audience of hackers reacted to his appearance on the dais with mystical fervor: "This is better than the Beatles coming to Shea Stadium," one told me. According to a study issued last March by the International Data Corporation, a market-research firm in Framingham, Massachusetts, that specializes in information technology, the use of Linux will grow by at least 25 percent a year for at least the next five years; Torvalds's not "big and professional" project, the study says, will be breathing down the neck of Microsoft Windows by 2003.

A simple cost comparison suggests the plausibility of this scenario. The basic version of Windows NT, Microsoft's operating system for computer networks, has a list price of \$319 per user and requires a Pentium chip. A small start-up company—not to mention libraries, schools, and other nonprofits—must pay thousands of dollars to equip its work-



ers. Linux, which is equally powerful, may be downloaded gratis, no matter how many people use it, and can run on older, 486-chip personal computers—boxes that used-computer stores sell for a hundred dollars.

Linux may have its greatest impact on poor countries, which can use free software on

cheap machines to create computer systems just as good as or better than the systems in rich countries. The executive director of Linux International, a nonprofit group devoted to promoting the operating system, is Jon Hall, a manager at Compaq, which has provided Linux on powerful high-end machines since 1995 and which recently announced a new line of Linux-loaded machines for small businesses. In his view, Linux has already broken the rich nations' monopoly

on access to computing—an economic mainstay of the information age.

Because open-source software doesn't have to be registered and can be shot across the Net at will, precise information on its use in poor nations is impossible to obtain. Nonetheless, glimpses of its spread suggest that Hall may be right. Third World hackers have made major contributions to Linux—the first important computer-industry development in which they have been able to participate. Though Chad, Niger, Liberia, Equatorial Guinea, and the Central African Republic have few Internet hubs, every one of those runs on Linux, according to a survey conducted in April using data from the European Internet Protocol Network (one of the three regional registries of Internet addresses). Last October the Mexican government announced plans to put more than a million Linux computers in its schools. And so on. "The next Albert Einstein of computer science might come from Korea, or China, or Venezuela, or even Helsinki, Finland," Jon Hall has written, *"and the world cannot afford to miss the opportunity of finding them."*

MICROSOFT Windows in its limited number of variants is sold by one company. Linux, in contrast, can be obtained from a dozen or more vendors. Because each vendor has adapted the operating system in its own way, and because the software itself is so labile, each Linux user will have a different experience. That's part of the point.

I began my own experimentation by downloading Linux free from a Web site: Debian.org. Debian, a loose collective of programmers, is positioned near one end of the arc of open-source software—the end with the most geek credibility, because it is militantly devoted to the hacker ethos. Through no fault of Debian's, I didn't download all 800 megabytes of Linux from its Web site: I stopped after a few hours, because my noisy phone line kept losing the connection.

Debian's version of Linux is offered by online retailers; CheapBytes.com sells the current release, Debian 2.1, on CD-ROM for \$2.49 plus shipping and handling. But after several download failures I was too grumpy to wait for it to arrive in the mail. I drove to CompUSA, the computer superstore nearest my house, where to my surprise I found at the end of one aisle a six-foot rack of Red Hat Linux

products. Red Hat is on the opposite end of the arc from Debian. Although it follows the open-source rule book, the company aggressively markets itself, and Compaq, IBM, Intel, and Novell are investors. Red Hat Linux on CD-ROM sells for \$39.95 (a deluxe version costs \$79.95): less than Windows, but an order of magnitude more than Debian.

Most people who buy a Linux CD-ROM plan to install the software on a machine that is already running Windows or Mac OS, and want to keep working with their old programs; Red Hat Linux includes a program called "LILO"—for "Linux Loader"—that lets such users switch between operating systems. I planned to install Linux on an old 486-50 that my family uses to store aged but potentially useful material.

Because I had souped up the computer with new components over the years, I expected trouble. It arrived within seconds of inserting the start-up floppy disk. The installation program looked for the Linux CD-ROM and couldn't find it, because it didn't recognize the Trantor adapter in my NEC CD-ROM drive. A search on the Internet informed me that Trantor had been bought by Adaptec, which no longer supported my adapter. I also found several futile pleas by Linux users for help with their Trantor adapters. So I went to a used-computer store and bought a . . .

There's little point in continuing. Installing Linux in an old Windows or Macintosh box is like putting a new clutch in a car. Some people like this sort of thing and some don't. I like it more than many people I know, though I'm not particularly good at it. People who don't like to tinker should either pay someone else to install Linux or, better, obtain a brand-new computer with Linux already on its hard drive, which is what I did next.

I borrowed a computer from VA Linux Systems, of Sunnyvale, California, the biggest Linux-only computer maker. As a graduate student in engineering at Stanford, Larry Augustin, the company president, discovered that by loading Linux on a 486 PC he could make a powerful workstation for about a quarter of the prevailing price. One thing led to another, and in 1993 VA Linux Systems was born (the name comes from the initials of Augustin and James Vera, a former partner). Augustin helped his fellow students David Filo and Jerry Yang write the initial business plan for Yahoo!—an Inter-

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net-search company with a current stock valuation of more than \$30 billion. Augustin is not yet a billionaire, but he assured me that Linux will grow so much that VA "will be bigger [than Yahoo!] in the end." Indeed, he said, its monthly sales tripled from November to March.

When Donna Sokolsky, the public-relations person for VA, asked why I wanted the computer, I explained that I hoped to see what Linux would be like if bought in the same way that most people buy Windows or Mac OS—pre-loaded on a machine. Sighing, Sokolsky said something like "Well, you have to understand that Linux isn't really ready for the casual user yet." This turned out to be not completely true. In certain situations Linux is better suited to non-experts than are other operating systems—something about which, upon reflection, I could not feel entirely happy.

LINUX, Torvalds warned early on, "is a program for hackers by a hacker." Indeed, Unix, the inspiration for GNU and Linux, is exactly the kind of software that makes the uninitiated feel stupid. Militantly unintuitive, it requires the mastering of dozens of telegraphic commands such as "egrep," "ping," and "gzip," all of which can be modified to act in any number of ways familiar to anyone who remembers MS-DOS. Novices can easily view this approach as daunting. One of the help files distributed with Linux unblushingly gives, as a "realistic example," the following command to decompress all the compressed files in the current directory without erasing any of them:

```
find . -name '*.gz' -print | sed
's/^\.(\.)*[.]gz$/gunzip < "&" > "\1"/'
| sh
```

How could anything that requires people to learn this gibberish be gaining in popularity?

Hackers prefer typed commands to point-and-click menus, because these usually permit better control of the machine; they like open-source software because they can add options as needed. The purpose of Windows and Mac OS is to create a seamless experience for the user, which is usually accomplished by gluing together separate pieces of software. Examples of this agglomerating tendency abound, including Microsoft's attempt to meld Internet Explorer, its Web browser, into Windows—which led to the antitrust bat-

tle that began last fall. Conceptually more important was the decision, first by Apple and then, imitating it, by Microsoft, to fuse the operating system with the graphical user interface—the software that lets people run the operating system by clicking the mouse on windows on a computer “desktop.” With Macintoshes there are no typed commands. Grudgingly, almost covertly, Windows does permit typed-in commands, but Microsoft supposedly has been trying to eliminate the DOS command line in the next versions.

This is abhorrent to Linux partisans. From their point of view, the best practice is to separate the operating system from the user interface and applications, so that if one application freezes up, the system won’t crash. (IBM’s challenger to Windows, the lamented but for-hackers-only OS/2, rigorously maintained this separation, and its safety made it the object of a cult.) I have terrible Netscape karma, for instance—Netscape crashes when I’m anywhere near it. With Windows, Netscape usually takes down the whole computer; when I try to exit the frozen program, I end up having to reboot. With Linux the program is just as badly behaved, but I can kill it without bringing everything else down with it. Indeed, I have not yet managed to lock up Linux, despite giving it, in my incompetence, plenty of excuses to go belly-up. My Windows box dies every day or so; Mac OS, when I use it, rarely lasts a day without needing a reboot.

For all its obvious advantages, Linux strikes most people as hard to use, because they don’t want to learn typed commands. To bring Linux to the masses, programmers around the world have spent years developing a point-and-click interface—an effort that is now paying off. The attempt to make Linux (and Unix) easier to use began with a project called, variously, X Window, X11, and simply X. Launched in the 1980s as a joint project between MIT and Digital, X is free software that provides a way for Linux computers to draw graphics on the monitor—but, in the spirit of the operating system, without requiring any particular method

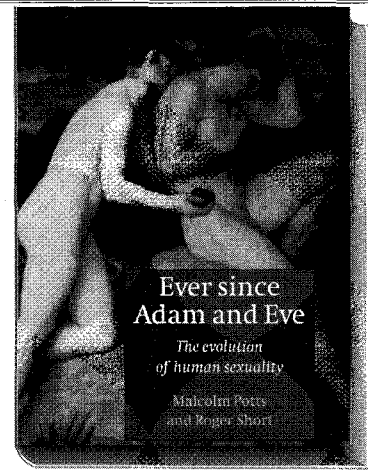
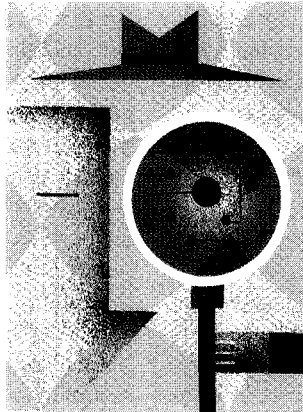
of putting up windows. That is left up to the “window manager”—software that lays out how the onscreen windows look and act.

More than half a dozen Linux window managers are available, all of them with features that are so obviously good ideas that the failure of Microsoft and Apple to imitate them is baffling. In every one I know, users can have multiple desktops, so that instead of piling windows higgledy-piggledy atop one another, users can distribute them among desktops. With a single click of the mouse, users can instantly switch from one desktop to another.

The latest step in the campaign to domesticate Linux has been to create “desktop environments,” software that adds features to the window managers to let users control and configure their comput-

ers. Again, modular construction: the environment rides on top of the window manager, which rides on top of the graphical user interface, which rides on top of the operating system. As with Windows and Mac OS, Linux desktops have icons that users click on to run programs, “drag-and-drop” features that permit people to move text and files with the mouse, and the equivalent of taskbars, called “panels” or “pagers,” which list running programs and desktops. Unlike the Windows desktop, Linux desktops do not force people who want to turn off their computers to click a button labeled START. Unlike the Mac OS desktop, Linux desktops do not ask users to eject floppy disks by dragging them to the trash—the same action used to erase files.

In the past year alone two competing groups of programmers have released desktop environments (KDE and GNOME, both available in Red Hat 6.0) that are graphically sophisticated and far easier to customize than their proprietary cousins. Although neither eliminates the need to type in commands and hand-configure Linux, each makes Linux ideal for schools and small businesses—places that are likely to have both computer-administration staff and tight budgets. Companies that need feature-rich software should beware: the two Linux “office suites” I have



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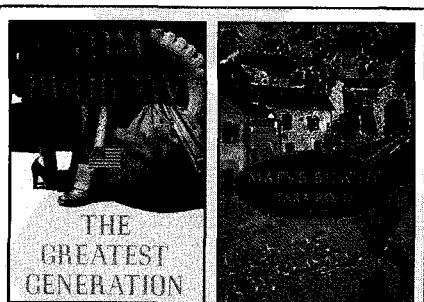
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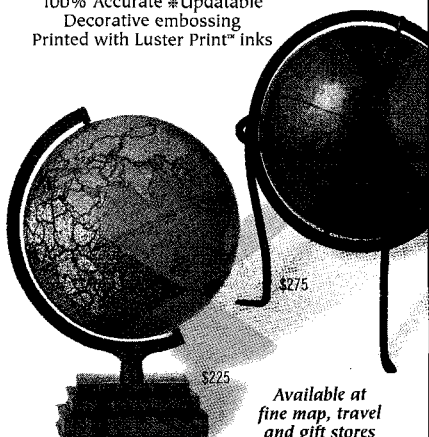
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tried, though adequate for most home users, are still poor relations to those put out by Microsoft and Corel. But soon—in months, not years—computer makers will be selling “turnkey” Linux systems with fully configured desktops and pre-installed office applications.

When turnkey Linux systems become widely available, Stallman will have achieved much of his preposterous goal. No single person, company, or institution will own the software through which people interact with computers. The accomplishment will be remarkable. And yet turnkey systems—machines that require no choices or understanding from the user—fit uncomfortably with the ideals of freedom that began the GNU Project and the free-software movement.

WHEN Linux boots up, it sprays dozens of cryptic messages on the monitor, informing the user precisely what is happening inside the computer. The messages exemplify the transparency hackers like about Linux: it permits complete control of the machine. In our technological era control of computers is an increasingly valuable kind of freedom. Sensing this, people readily distrust the corporations that make technological choices for them—one reason that Microsoft will never be loved, despite the many economic benefits it has conferred on the nation. At the same time, the line of boot-up messages stuttering down the monitor makes clear that this freedom comes at a price—a learning curve that can be long and frustrating.

VA Linux Systems lent me a computer that far surpassed my modest needs, not that I complained. Intended for use as a central computer in a network, it came with nothing so primitive as a modem. Wanting to connect to the Internet, I once again drove to CompUSA and bought a modem. When I got home, I was confronted with the task of figuring out how to hook it up—the maker provided no instructions.

I spent a day or two puttering through the help files, newsgroup archives, and books. But just when I was ready to get down to work connecting the modem, I lost all interest. I was suffering from what the writer Neal Stephenson calls “geek fatigue”—the desire to stop learning about, and fiddling with, a computer. (Last spring, in conjunction with the publication of his novel, *Cryptonomi-*

con, Stephenson made available a long, shrewd, funny online essay about operating systems, “In the Beginning was the Command Line.”) I wanted somebody else to solve my problem. I called the nearby university and asked the computer center if I could pay someone to assist me. Within ten minutes I received an E-mail offering help. After his calculus test Dan came over. It was a humiliating cliché: an adult getting computer help from an eighteen-year-old. I loved it. Dan quickly found the dumb mistake I had made, fixed it, and amiably showed me a few other things. I paid him fifty dollars.

My ideas about liberty were unexpectedly challenged when Dan asked whether I wanted him to make an account for himself on my machine; if I had further problems, he could dial in and resolve them from his home. VA technical support made a similar offer: my machine came with a “back door”—a pre-installed route by which company technicians could take over my computer and inspect the contents. Even if I asked Dan or VA to maintain my computer, it would be effectively impossible for anyone to enter it without my permission. But I would still be surrendering control.

Every contemporary operating system allows outside supervisors to control a user's machine, but with Linux the control is especially complete. Supervisors aren't limited by the choices left to them by Microsoft or Apple: they can do exactly what they want. If bosses don't want employees to download pictures from the Internet, that can be arranged. If they want alarms to sound when employees show signs of inefficiency, that, too, is possible. Every keystroke can be recorded and analyzed.

As is always the case with technology, the only way to control its impact is to understand it. That can't be done for every innovation—look at the “12:00” blinking on videocassette recorders across the nation. Computers have become too important to be unquestioningly turned over to others to run. But they are a tremendous burden to maintain without help. Living with Linux has increased my awareness of the control exerted by computers even as it has stripped away my easy certainty about how much value I attach to liberty. Richard Stallman and Linus Torvalds may have launched a successful campaign to unseal every computer, but it is a pending question how many people will want to look inside. ☼

Is Work Bad for You?

A sociologist argues that the new "flexible" economy undermines employees' character. Our reviewer, a leading business theorist and management consultant, strongly disagrees

by Michael Hammer

THE CORROSION OF CHARACTER:

The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism

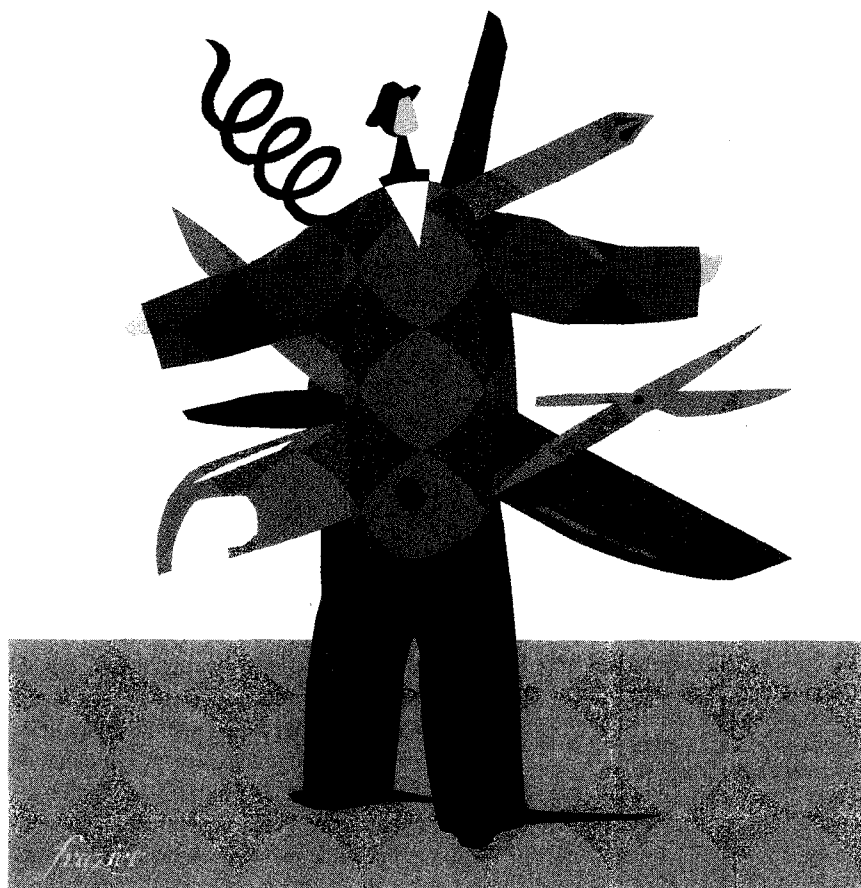
by Richard Sennett.
W. W. Norton, 176 pages.
\$23.95.

BOB R. is a field technician who works for a telephone company in a southern state. Bob's employer has recently "reengineered" its maintenance process to make the process more efficient. At the heart of the new way of working are small teams of field technicians, each of which is responsible for keeping a group of customers happy: fixing their phones when necessary, conducting preventive maintenance, and even selling add-on services. These technicians schedule their own work and make their own decisions when they show up at a customer site. Here is how Bob describes his new job: "I've been at the company for twenty-three years, and I always thought we were overmanaged, overcontrolled, and oversupervised. They treated us like children. We're having a very good time under the new system. They've given us the freedom to work on our own. This is the most intelligent thing this company has done in years. It's fun." (All people quoted here are specific individuals, not composites. They were interviewed in the course of preparing this review or for my book *Beyond Reengineering*.)

It is fortunate that Bob has not read *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, because he might discover that his new job is actually very bad for him. In this impressionistic essay, part philosophical rumination and part political tract, Richard Sennett, a professor of sociology at New York University and the London School of Economics, asserts that "the qualities of good work are not the qualities of good character." Work in the modern world of business, he says, "corrodes trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment," inflicts "demeaning superficiality" on human relationships, and even destroys people's very identity and sense of themselves by "threatening the ability of people to form their characters into sustained narratives."

The root cause of these problems, according to Sennett, is change, inflicted on workers by the usual suspects: rapacious capitalists chasing a quick buck.

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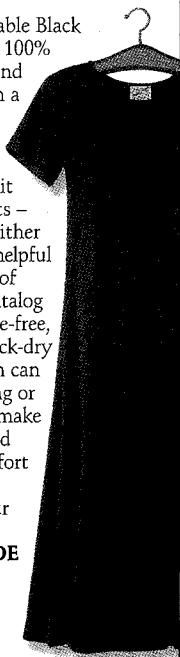
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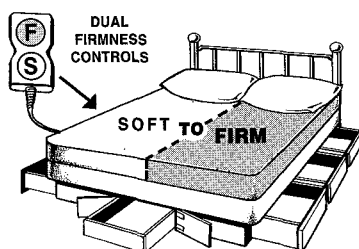
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of modern markets, disruption of organizations has become profitable. While disruption may not be justifiable in terms of productivity, the short-term returns to stockholders provide a strong incentive to the powers of chaos disguised by that seemingly assuring word "reengineering." Perfectly viable businesses are gutted or abandoned, capable employees are set adrift rather than rewarded, simply because the organization must prove to the market that it is capable of change.

Sennett maintains that in this world of change everything, especially work and workers, becomes purely short-term. There is no continuity or predictability to one's work life, so fashioning a personal history around a career of work becomes impossible and the result is a "sense of aimless drift." Work in this new regime is so fragmented that it is reduced to "simple, mindless tasks," and so dependent on machines as to make it incomprehensible: "her understanding of work is superficial; her identity as a worker is light." Modern work deprives jobs of any meaning; in a system that "radiates indifference," the question "Who needs me?" has no answer. The amorphous and ambiguous character of careers and organizations makes rational calculation about risk-taking impossible; one has a hard time knowing where one is in the modern organization, let alone how to navigate through it. People lose the ability to create a coherent narrative of their past that allows them to understand their failures and improve their character.

The nonbureaucratic organizational forms—networks and teams—that capitalists create to operate through change also "weaken character," Sennett writes, "character as Horace first described it, character as a connection to the world, as being necessary for others." The empty and superficial communication on which teamwork relies corrupts personal interactions, creating a "fiction of community" that turns human relations into "a farce." These mechanisms also offer management the opportunity for "concentration of power without centralization of power," for exercising control behind the scenes without taking responsibility for it, thereby hiding management's domination from workers and creating the "fiction . . . that workers and bosses aren't antagonists." Teamwork is especially insidious, because it offers workers the appearance

of control without its substance, preventing them from engaging in "straight talk involving demands for higher pay or less pressure to boost productivity."

THESE are just the major sins for which Sennett believes "work in the new capitalism" must answer. He also mentions increased income inequality, age discrimination, and decline in parental authority. There may be others, but it is hard to say, because this book is more an expression of angst than a coherent argument. Full of unsubstantiated assertions, non sequiturs, random digressions, and logical dead ends, it serves primarily as an opportunity for Sennett to express his distaste for "modern capitalism." There are in fact important changes occurring in the world of work, but they have little to do with the "capitalism" that figures so prominently in Sennett's title and throughout his book. These changes are not driven by the stock market or by who owns the means of production, and they are taking place in government agencies and nonprofit organizations as well as in corporations.

To begin with, outside Sennett's fantasy world investors are not so deranged as to reward random change, and managers are not so intent on exploiting their workers. Both groups are far more concerned with a fundamental phenomenon that is reshaping business and work—one that receives virtually no mention in this book: the ascendance of the customer.

The past twenty years have witnessed an epochal shift in the world economy, as power has moved from sellers to buyers. The forces behind this shift include greater productivity, owing to technological advances and improved work methods, which has increased output to the point where many industries suffer from overcapacity; intensified competition resulting from globalization and reduced barriers to entry; greater customer knowledge and sophistication, owing to greater accessibility of information; and the ever-quickenening rate of technological change. Compare the simple act of buying a car in 1999 with the same experience forty years ago. In 1959 your choices would have been essentially limited to the Big Three; unless you were a car aficionado, you would have known nothing about the cars other than what the dealers chose to tell you; and often the new models were virtually indistinguishable (except cos-

metically) from the previous year's. No longer. With globalization has come more choice: some thirty car companies now compete for your custom. A host of information sources, from *Consumer Reports* to Web sites, equip you to bargain with the dealer from a position of knowledge and strength. And the rapidity with which cars now change and improve makes waiting till next year increasingly tempting. You now have the upper hand, and the auto makers know it.

As a result, companies that once operated in secure and relaxed conditions of near monopoly now live in fear of their customers. Large retailers like Wal-Mart and Home Depot dictate terms to their suppliers; these retailers in turn are desperate to attract and retain fickle and sophisticated consumers. Manufacturers demand ever higher quality and ever lower prices from their suppliers, and are ready to abandon those who do not comply. Even companies in formerly regulated industries (telecommunications, electric power) are now subject to intense competition. The classic conflict between capital and labor has given way to a struggle between powerful customers and the companies from which they buy.

To borrow from Samuel Gompers's old labor slogan, powerful modern customers—whether consumers or corporations—want one thing: *more*. They want more product for less money, more quality and service, more flexibility and convenience, and more innovation. The guilty party in the morality play that is modern business is not the rapacious capitalist or the manipulative manager; it is you and I, every consumer who looks carefully at price and quality, who shops around, who abandons yesterday's product for today's better one. It is the powerful customer who has forced radical changes on the reluctant managers of organizations in every industry.

THE classic industrial model in which workers perform specialized tasks under layers of managerial oversight is completely unsuited to the new economic environment. It is too slow, too costly, too inflexible, to satisfy powerful customers. The result has been nothing less than the abandonment of that model—"Fordism," as the sociologists preciously call it. Customers will not accept the errors and excess costs that result when work is handed off from one narrow task worker to

another, so jobs are becoming much bigger and broader. Customers will not abide the delays that ensue when workers must bring all decisions to managers, so responsibility is being devolved to people on the front lines. Customers will not tolerate the inflexibility and complexity that come from dealing with a host of departments, from sales to service to production to accounting, so the walls between these departments have been knocked down and work is increasingly being done by teams of people from different departments. Customers will not be satisfied with yesterday's products, so innovation has become the new routine and learning is a fundamental part of everyone's job.

These changes are not confined to a few companies; they are taking place across all sectors of the economy.

- At GTE Telephone Operations, now GTE Network Services, a new position, called customer-care advocate, has been created. This job combines three previous positions: the customer-service rep who handles customer calls, the line checker who attempts to resolve problems by means of a computer system, and the dispatcher who sends out a field technician if necessary.

- At Hill's Pet Nutrition, a division of Colgate, the manufacturing worker at the Richmond, Indiana, plant who operates a machine now also is responsible for its maintenance.

- At Owens Corning orders are filled by a team composed of people from customer service, finance, transportation, and other departments. They have collective responsibility for an order from the time it is received until the bill is paid.

- At Progressive Auto Insurance calls from customers with accident claims go directly to a claims representative, who is responsible for seeing to it that the claims are handled immediately and settled quickly. The claims representative does as much as possible over the phone and arranges for the vehicle to be inspected by a teammate in the field.

- At The Trane Company, a manufacturer of air-conditioning equipment, production teams schedule their own work and deal directly with suppliers to get the parts they need.

- At Duke Power, a division of Duke Energy Corporation, a line technician is given a week's worth of jobs rather than a day's and is expected to schedule them himself. If he decides that the instructions

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for a job are not right, he has the authority to depart from them. He also has responsibility for a range of issues, from selecting cable size to placing lights, that were previously the province of an engineer.

None of these changes has grown out of an ideological or humanitarian impulse. But neither are they part of some Machiavellian plot to oppress the masses. They are simply responses by corporate managers to the threats posed by strong customers and surging competition. But, serendipitously, changes of this kind are having far more positive effects on people's work lives than did the fulminations of generations of ideologues. For the great majority of workers who hold them, the new jobs are much more fulfilling and rewarding than were the old jobs they replace. (Ironically, in many ways modern jobs actually resemble the Marxian ideal of *Tagwerk*, which Sennett approvingly cites.)

Diane G. processes applications for an insurance company. In the old days she was a clerk who did the same task over and over. Now she handles applications from beginning to end. She says, "The main thing that has happened is that the work is a lot more satisfying, because we are focused on customers and wanting to help them. With most of the busywork gone, we can concentrate more on the customer's need and on trying to make sure everything is done correctly. The company is letting me do the best job that I can do. They have shown us confidence. I feel appreciated and am not just a number anymore."

Jerry P., a team leader in a manufacturing plant, says, "We now have more control over our own jobs. In the past we had no say-so. People who do the work know it best, and now the company takes feedback from them. People now enjoy their jobs. It's not a drag coming to work each day. People have more pride in what they're doing."

Deborah P. does accounting for a media company. "Before, I was pretty bored and thinking about leaving," she says. "I felt like I was in a box. Now I'm really challenged and stimulated by the work. I could never go back to the old kind of organization."

Ed B. is an accounts-receivable team leader in a manufacturing company. He says, "The best part of how we work now is that you can see where you fit in, how all the parts of the company fit together."

VIRTUALLY everything Sennett asserts about modern work is, in a word, wrong. He claims that "difficulty is counterproductive in a flexible regime." To the contrary, flexibility demands larger and more-complex jobs. A person doing a broader (and therefore more difficult) job can respond to a new situation far more easily than can a mass of uncoordinated people doing simple individual jobs.

Sennett also claims that modern capitalism creates "detachment and confusion" among workers. To the contrary, modern capitalism demands much greater involvement and understanding on the part of its workers; only engaged and knowledgeable workers can make the day-to-day decisions they are called upon to make. Duke Power, as part of a growing trend, has dramatically increased its training budget and has put thousands of front-line people through a program that explains the changing nature of the electric-power industry, the competitive threats the company is facing, and the economic structure of the company. Deborah P., the media-company accountant, says, "Management is much more open with us. I received a copy of my team's budget in today's mail with last year's forecast, the year-to-date actuals, to what degree we're over or under. In the old days it was unheard of to know the real numbers. I think people are starting to feel that the company's goals and objectives are theirs, rather than something that was just handed down."

Sennett disdains teamwork; Jerry P., the manufacturing-plant team leader, does not. "In the past," he says, "it was my work; nobody cared about the next person. If something went wrong, it was somebody else's problem. Now it's teamwork, and we work together as a group to fix problems."

John B. is a thirty-three-year veteran at an electric-power company and a former president of the union local. He was also a member of the team that designed the new ways of working in his company. He says, "In the old days there were strict trade-craft rules; a repairman didn't do an electrician's job or an operator's. Now the lines are blurred, and people can do more to work to their capabilities. There are fewer foremen, and the front lines have the power to decide their own work. People have more impact on the business, and you can see the

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Arabian Fables (I)

How the Arabs soften up world opinion with fanciful myths.

Josef Goebbels, the infamous propaganda minister of the Nazis, had it right. Just tell people big lies often enough and they'll believe them. The Arabs have learned that lesson well. They have swayed world opinion by myths and lies that have no basis in fact.

What are some of these myths?

The "Palestinians". The concept of "Palestinians" did not exist until about 1948. Until then, the Jews were the Palestinians. There was the Palestinian Brigade of Jewish volunteers in the British World War II Army (at a time when the Palestinian Arabs were in Berlin hatching plans with Adolf Hitler for world conquest and how to kill all the Jews); there was the Palestinian Symphony Orchestra (all Jews, of course); there was *The Palestine Post*; and so much more.

The Arabs who now call themselves "Palestinians" do so in order to persuade a misinformed world that they are a distinct nationality and that "Palestine" is their ancestral homeland. But they are no distinct nationality at all. They are the same as the Arabs of Syria, Jordan, and beyond. There is no more difference between the "Palestinians" and the other Arabs of those countries than there is between, say, the citizens of Minnesota and those of Wisconsin. What's more, many of the "Palestinians", or their immediate ancestors, came to the area attracted by the prosperity created by the Jews, in what previously had been pretty much of a wasteland. The nationhood of the "Palestinians" is a myth.

The "West Bank". Again, this is a concept that did not exist until 1948, when six Arab armies invaded the Jewish state of Israel, on the very day of its creation. Miraculously, the ragtag Jewish forces defeated the combined Arab might. But Transjordan stayed in possession of Judea and Samaria and eastern Jerusalem. The

Jordanians expelled all the Jews, destroyed all Jewish houses of worship, and renamed as "West Bank" the territories that had been Judea and Samaria since time immemorial. The attempt, quite successful, was to persuade an uninformed world that these were ancestral parts of the Jordanian Arab Kingdom.

"The web of lies and myths that the Arab propaganda machine has created plays an important role in the unrelenting quest to destroy the State of Israel. What a shame that the world has accepted most of it!"

Even after the total rout of the Arabs in the 1967 Six-Day War, in which the Jordanians were driven out of Judea/Samaria and of Jerusalem, they and the world continued to call this territory the "West Bank", a geographical and political concept that cannot be found on any except the most recent maps.

The concept of the "West Bank" is a myth.

The "Occupied Territories". After the victorious Six-Day War, during which the Israeli army defeated the same cabal of Arabs that had invaded the country in 1948, Israel regained possession of Judea/Samaria, the Gaza Strip, which had been occupied by the Egyptians, and of the Golan Heights, a plateau the size of Queens, which, though originally part of Palestine, had been assigned to Syria by British-French agreement.

The last sovereign in Judea/Samaria and in Gaza was the British mandatory power — and before it was the Ottoman Empire. All of Palestine, including what is now the Kingdom of Jordan, was, by the Balfour Declaration, destined to be the Jewish National Home. How then could the Israelis possibly be "occupiers" in their own territory? Who would be the sovereign and who the rightful inhabitants?

The concept of "occupied territories" is an Arab created propaganda myth.

Unable so far to destroy Israel on the battlefield — though they are feverishly preparing for their next assault — the Arabs are now trying to overcome and destroy Israel by their acknowledged "policy of stages". That policy is to get as much land as possible carved out of Israel "by peaceful and diplomatic" means, so as to make Israel indefensible and softened up for the final assault. The web of lies and myths that the Arab propaganda machine has created plays an important role in the unrelenting quest to destroy the State of Israel. What a shame that the world has accepted most of it!

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difference in their attitudes. They feel more ownership of the business. Morale is excellent."

Perhaps Sennett would suggest that John B. and the others suffer from false consciousness. But in reality modern work is an enormous improvement over classic industrial-era jobs. The life of routine and hierarchy, which Sennett describes with nostalgia, was actually stultifying and oppressive; it destroyed the worker's mind and soul. (As one worker at a pharmaceutical plant puts it, "For twenty years I had to check my brain at the gate.")

But what of Sennett's central contention that a world of change and uncertainty corrodes people's characters by destroying their ability to form coherent narratives of their lives? This, as the lawyers say, must be answered in the alternative.

First, today's jobs are not nearly as tenuous or in as much jeopardy as Sennett implies. The era of slash-and-burn downsizing is largely over, primarily because companies have learned that it does not work. People need not fear for their jobs at every turn. Nonetheless, the old certainties are indeed gone; no one can count on a "job for life" anymore. But why should a lack of certainty and predictability be injurious to one's character? Ed B., the accounts-receivable team leader, does not believe that it is. He says, "Flexibility is good, because it gives me the opportunity to experience new things, to put new tools in my back pack, to add to my personal career development." The old social contract between companies and employees traded obedience for a stable job, but taxed the transaction with routine and boredom; under the new one, the company expects flexibility and initiative from the employee, and offers in return an opportunity to learn and grow, to have a real career instead of merely a job—though this career may not all be spent at the same company. Who is to say that the old deal was better than the new one?

At some level, however, the debate about whether flexibility is good or bad is academic in the worst sense of the word, because there is nothing to be done about it. The customer is the one who demands flexibility from companies, and therefore from employees. A company is able to guarantee its employees long-term employment only if the customer

guarantees the company long-term business—which is not about to happen. As the president of an auto-parts maker has told his employees, “I can’t guarantee you a job. A union contract can’t guarantee you a job. Only the customer can guarantee you a job.”

The new world of work is hardly Edenic. It poses troubling questions of the sort that one would have hoped to see this book address. As people become more engaged in their daily work, finding in it satisfaction rather than tedium, will they have less time and energy for the other parts of their lives? The new work environment expects everyone to be

a kind of entrepreneur: self-starting, autonomous, responsible. What about people who are not up to this challenge, or simply do not want to rise to it? Some people report that as many as half of their co-workers have difficulty adapting to a world of responsibility; what will their fate be? How will people react to a career path based not on hierarchical advancement but on personal development? These questions compel our attention, but they will have to await the insights of someone who approaches them with a more open and more informed mind than Richard Sennett displays in this unsatisfying book. ☞

BRIEF REVIEWS



True at First Light

by Ernest Hemingway.

Scribner, 320 pages, \$26.00.

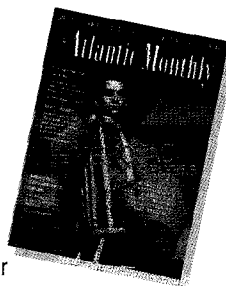
Patrick Hemingway, who edited this “fictional memoir,” provides a graceful introduction that does not explain the condition in which the author left the material, or whether he ever talked about it with his son. What the reader gets here is a story about the problems besetting Hemingway as the leader of a safari that is a semi-official arm of the Kenyan game department. It is not a traditional hunting party. The object is to kill destructive or dangerous animals, including baboons. (This last matter is not described, lest baboon-lovers take offense.) The tension of lion and leopard executions is superbly conveyed, as are the joking and teasing among the men and that peculiar, depersonalized alertness that comes with total concentration on the surrounding environment. This is all sound Hemingway. The problem with the book is the lack of any conclusion. The time is shortly before Christmas, when a great party is planned for the camp and all the neighbors and connections. There is much reference to the Birthday of the Baby Jesus. Miss Mary (Mrs. Hemingway, and the only woman

in camp) insists that a particular tree be transplanted into camp as a Christmas tree. Nobody tells her that this species of tree is the source of a violent drug. The Africans, confused and gullible about European habits, believe that Miss Mary’s determination to shoot a particular lion is, like the tree, part of her religion. Some of them also enjoy membership in a mischievously hedonistic religion concocted by Hemingway. The several Muslims, of course, do not participate in the follies of unbelievers. A mission school in the area requires its students to wear heavy shoes but seems to accomplish little else. All these religious elements appear to be leading to some explosion or merger at the Christmas party, but that party never comes. The text simply stops. Possibly Hemingway never got around to deciding between a bang and a whimper. As for the work’s being a memoir, Hemingway did not keep diaries or journals, and the present text includes (along with other intriguing and amusing side issues) the statement “All a writer of fiction is really is a congenital liar who invents from his own knowledge or that of other men. I am a writer of fiction and so I am a liar too.” One can only wonder why he never came to the end of this good lie.

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Great Stone Circles

by Aubrey Burl.

Yale, 200 pages, \$30.00.

Mr. Burl is an archaeologist well known for his studies of megalithic structures in Britain, Ireland, and Brittany. His latest analyses of a number of sites involve diagrams, measurements and maps (not all readily decipherable), and expert photographs of the surrounding territory—frequently handsome country. Why these structures were built and how they were used remains unknowable. Physical comparisons are possible, however, and Mr. Burl's argument for Breton influence on Stonehenge is impressive.

Nansen:

The Explorer as Hero

by Roland Huntford.

Barnes & Noble, 610 pages,
 \$19.95.

Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930) was born in Oslo to an unimpressive lawyer and his aristocratic wife. The boy became an expert skier and matured into the classic Nordic type—tall, blond, and handsome. He studied zoology, which led to a trip on a sealing vessel for the collection of marine specimens. Sealing meant the Arctic and the ice, and Nansen was off to international heroic status as leader of the first expedition to cross Greenland and later of the *Fram* journey that established the action of currents in the Arctic Ocean ice pack. Mr. Huntford's account of Nansen's other accomplishments is thorough and necessarily (and rewardingly) long, for Nansen can be considered a founder of the sport of mountain skiing and wrote a revolutionary doctoral thesis on the operations of the nervous system. Nansen claimed that he was given his doctorate out of pity, because the authorities thought he would not survive his proposed crossing of Greenland. The theory remains a basic element of modern neurology. Nansen invented improved gear for arctic travel, although the stove was not as effective as he had hoped. He was active in the complicated diplomatic maneuvers surrounding Norway's independence from Sweden, and became Norway's first ambassador to England. He wound up, after the First World War, in charge of repatriating displaced refugees. In 1925 he was elected Lord Rector of St. Andrew's University,

in Scotland, and delivered a quietly witty speech advocating, in essence, independent thinking and the nerve to go it alone. He subsequently "attended the Rectorial dance" and whirled about the floor "until long past 1 a.m." That figures, for Nansen had a considerable reputation for what his biographer terms "womanizing." It is probable that he simply neglected to dodge beauties who threw themselves at him. Mr. Huntford, with much material to quote from and a lively period in both exploration and politics to cover, has produced a splendid biography of a splendidly versatile man.

By Airship to the North Pole

by P. J. Capelotti.

Rutgers, 224 pages, \$26.00.

When Nansen's *Fram* emerged from the ice pack and headed home, its first stop was at Virgo Harbor, in the Spitzbergen Archipelago, where the crew came upon the Swedish engineer Salomon Andrée preparing for a balloon flight to the North Pole. The flight was a disaster, and subsequent attempts by the American journalist Walter Wellman barely got off the ground. They did provide much copy for his paper. Both expeditions left a lot of debris at Virgo Harbor, and the value of examining such material is the subject of Mr. Capelotti's book. He has conducted archaeological work on the site. The first section of his text, on the flights and the men involved, is active and opinionated. The following, archaeological section is fairly technical and ultimately demonstrates first that explorers do not always report precisely what they did, and second that scholarly interpretation of their reports is not always accurate either.

Dancing With Cats

by Burton Silver and Heather Busch.

Chronicle, 96 pages,
 \$16.95.

Author and photographer document the performances of people who dance with their cats. Whether or not one accepts the claim that the practice demonstrates "a way of exploring new spiritual insights that will guide us in the third millennium," the cats look great.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams



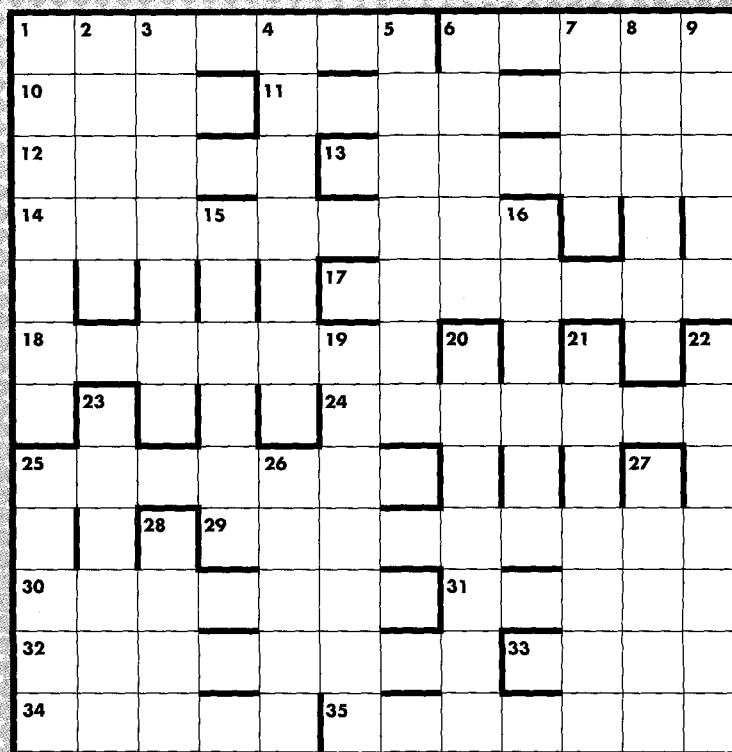
THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

At the Movies

Here at the Cryptic Cinema we pride ourselves on finding and reviewing little-known films. Below is a selection from our extensive files. Solvers will discover that these movie reviews actually make up the 38 clues to this month's puzzle. They are strung together randomly, except that the 18 Across clues occur first, followed by the 20 Down clues. The locations of the words in the grid are to be deduced. Answers include two proper nouns.

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 91.



Clues

Dances With Sheep: A lawyer's Western eroticism has more serious nature, in a strange sense; average.

The End of Time: Meteors flying, actors venting melodramatically while repeatedly in awe; ultimately idiotic spectacle.

Spy in the Middle: CIA operative catches a thief (Pacino) dressed in bovine clothing.

Heavy Breathing: A Highlander's item of attire excites some virile studs; the comeback of Bridges in pictures brought to an end.

Crime Boss: Empty vessel bears cryptic clue, making police officer crack it.

A Man's Endurance: Caught in avalanche, Alda gets dehydrated, eating pear.

Torn Curtains: Couple of rascals at college in screwball comedy.

Rule of the People: Where barflies gather, Selleck has a favorable

part in speech for law and order after the first unruly crowd incident; with offensive language (rated R).

I, Lunatic: Arriving comparatively late, Streep goes nuts about Norse writer (Wayne, miscast); royal bore, silent through the first half.

Valachi's Back: Criminal element rest up in sheds, get guns during Prohibition for booze supplier, set fires around a road to create false rumors, get killed while keeping vast stretches in disorder; Italian director of violent films in finale.

Oneyrophobia: State of profound torpor starts to concern old monk; apparitions are like places unfolded in Poe novel; with Beatty, MacGraw.

The Wings of Earthmen: Creature from another planet grows monstrous and must eat deformed body in space, swallowing one in flight; stylistically dark Japanese drama.

Heart of Fire: Buddy film with fortune-teller and Met oddly working together.

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

WORD WATCH

by Anne H. Soukhanov

deep-background private placement

noun, the covert release of potentially damaging but ultimately insuppressible information by a highly placed anonymous source to a single, carefully chosen reporter, so that the information does as little damage as possible: "In addition to the document dumps, our second device for getting bad stories written early and accurately was the so-called 'deep-background private placement'" (Lanny J. Davis, *Truth to Tell: Notes From My White House Education*).

BACKGROUND: Davis, a special counsel to President Bill Clinton from December of 1996 through January of 1998, used *deep-background private placement*—a rarefied form of spin, in which the aim is to control the treatment of revelations that cannot simply be squelched—sparingly. According to Davis, selection of the reporter is crucial. Good choices are reporters who work for wire services (major newspapers tend to resist putting wire-service stories on the front page) or for West Coast papers (the large East Coast dailies often downplay stories broken by out-of-towners). Timing is also important, and a leaker may negotiate to have the story released on a Saturday, when its impact will be muted.

NEW acronym, nonexplosive warfare: "Once again we have found it necessary to call on our armed forces to limit the power and ambition of Saddam Hussein's military machine. . . . [But] a longer term struggle is . . . beginning. It is so novel, it warrants . . . a new acronym. My proposed acronym is *NEW*—nonexplosive warfare" (Richard Danzig in *The New York Times*).

BACKGROUND: When Danzig proposed this coinage, in an op-ed piece last November, he had just been named Secretary of

A selection of terms that have newly been coined, that have recently acquired new currency, or that have taken on new meanings, compiled by the executive editor of The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition.

the Navy. As he explains it, *NEW* threatens the United States with two types of "viruses"—biological and high-tech—which can often be overcome on the battlefield but are difficult to counter if unleashed against civilian targets. Danzig argues that these viruses are best considered "weapons of mass disruption," because they are likely to be used as much to engender panic and confusion as to sow widespread destruction. The *NEW* threat is particularly ominous in that biological and computer viruses can be created relatively cheaply, in obscure locations, and deployed by a single aircraft in the one case or at the click of a mouse in the other.

ostension *noun*, a process by which people act out so-called urban myths or other contemporary apocryphal stories, in

some cases because they believe them—thus making the myths real: "Even though the . . . rumor ['Fear May 10,' scrawled on some Maryland public school lockers] is so inexplicit, some officials . . . worried that it [might] give someone the idea to act on it—a phenomenon called *ostension*" (*Washington Post*).

BACKGROUND: This is a relatively new sense of a word that is rooted in the Latin verb *ostendere* (to show). *Ostension* first appeared in English in 1474, meaning simply "a manifestation." An ecclesiastical sense (the elevation of the Eucharistic elements before the eyes of a congregation) emerged in 1607. In 1950 a meaning arose relating to philosophy and logic (the explanation of a word by indicating one or more objects to which it applies). Ex-

amples of the newest sense of the word include the behavior of teenagers who have enacted what was originally a myth about gang members' driving at night without headlights and shooting at motorists who flash their lights, and the efforts of people to collect metal pop tabs from cans because they have heard that charities recycle them for cash. Sociologists attribute the rapid proliferation of such myths in large part to electronic communications.

philosopause

noun, a point at which a researcher, weary of or frustrated by rigorous laboratory-based science, begins to look for nonscientific, philosophical explanations instead: "Too many of the characters [in John Horgan's book *The End of Science*] have entered the phase of their career that has been called 'the *philosopause*.' They have retired from the university or grown bored with lab work, and so have taken up professional cogitation" (Natalie Angier in *The New York Times*).

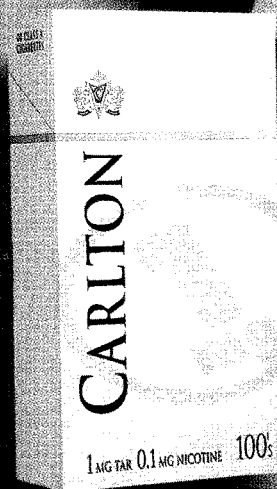
BACKGROUND: This term, which is perhaps loosely derived from "menopause," was originally used specifically for neuroscientists, some of whom have tended, as they've grown older, to abandon science-based attempts to map the workings of the brain and have turned instead to more general speculations about the nature of consciousness. Owing largely to advances in artificial intelligence, molecular genetics, psychopharmacology, and brain imaging, in recent years these distinct approaches have been joined in an endeavor known as *neurophilosophy*—mitigating, perhaps, the impulse for neuroscientists to experience a *philosopause*. The term seems, however, to be taking on a new, broader life, as suggested by the citation above, in which it is applied to scientists of all stripes.



Illustration by Michael C. Witte

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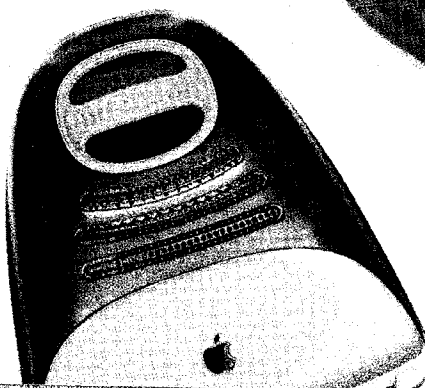
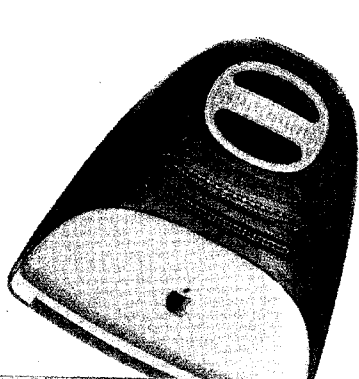
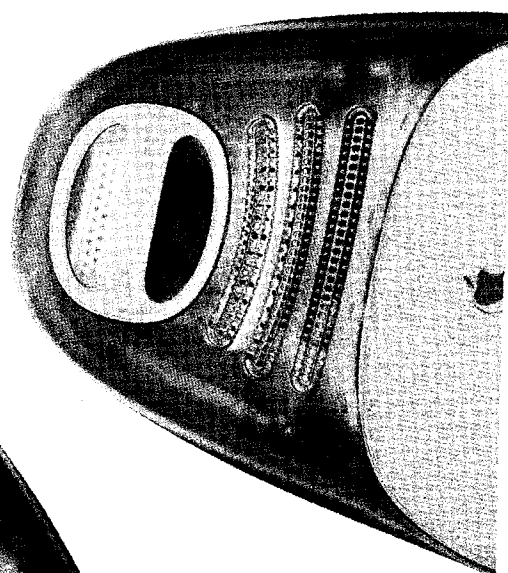
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